THE CHURCH'S

YEAR OF GRACE

Advent to Candlemas

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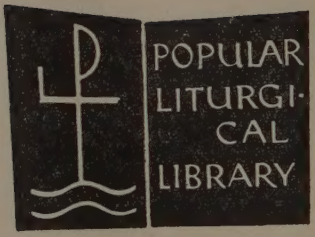
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The Church's

YEAR OF GRACE

by

DR. PIUS PARSCH

TRANSLATED BY
Reverend William G. Heidt, O.S.B.

Volume 1

Advent to Candlemas

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THE LITURGICAL PRESS
ST. JOHN'S ABBEY COLLEGEVILLE, MINNESOTA

Acknowledgments: In the preparation of the English edition of this volume of *The Church's Year of Grace*, the following rendered invaluable assistance: Reverend Basil Stegman, O.S.B.; Reverend John A. Otto; Mr. John Schneider.

Illustrations by Brother Placid, O.S.B.

Nihil obstat: John Eidenschink, O.S.B., J.C.D., *Censor deputatus. Imprimi potest*: ✠ Baldwin Dworschak, O.S.B., Abbot of St. John's Abbey. *Imprimatur*: ✠ Peter W. Bartholome, D.D., Bishop of St. Cloud. September 30, 1957.

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Printed by The North Central Publishing Company, St. Paul.

The Proper of the Season

THE LITURGICAL YEAR: HISTORY OR MYSTERY?

An examination of the Church's liturgy reveals great versatility in the presentation of content. Sometimes the texts reflect the purely historical, yet so vividly as to make the events seem current. At times the entire action pertains to the present, as grace is petitioned or proclaimed. Or our sights are lifted high, to the parousia, to heaven and judgment, with the future clearly scored. In doing so the liturgical texts leap directly from one area of reference to another, even within the same sentence. Often it is doubtful which area is intended; or perhaps it is left undecided. We may wonder how we are to absorb and profitably employ this lively variation in perspective. What does the liturgy expect of us? Does it wish us to recall the story of salvation? Is it offering us grace in the present? Or is it perhaps seeking to prepare us for the life to come?

In general two things are required to derive profit from the Church's changing liturgy: we must understand it and apply it. We must first of all grasp its dramatic character and secondly strive to make its message part of our life. For the liturgy is drama indeed, but it is no mere play-acting, devoid of spiritual content. Beneath the dramatic lies a rich store of grace and truth.

At the very outset we should have a clear understanding of the three distinct planes on which the liturgical drama is enacted.

1. The Historical Plane. As already mentioned, the liturgy re-presents events from history so vividly as to make them appear as happening today. Some of the scenes that are unfolded before us are from the Old Testament, many more are taken from the life of Christ. Consider, for example, the Christmas season. The

liturgy dramatically re-enacts Christ's advent and birth. During four preparatory weeks it readies us for the birth of our Savior. In a spirit of simple, childlike longing we approach the great feast; and on the day itself the liturgy leads us to Bethlehem's crib and shows us the newborn Son of God. It even speaks of a "new birth in the flesh." This historical treatment is applied, not only to the birth of Christ, but to His whole life, to the entire history of salvation, and to the lives of the saints. History, therefore, is an important constituent of liturgy.

2. The Plane of Grace. Activity in this plane, since it pertains directly to us, takes place in the present. The liturgy is operative here when it proclaims or produces God's life in our souls. Actually, the historical plane serves as a framework for the plane of grace. And the plane of grace is the pledge of future glory; it is eschatologically prognostic.

In this plane the Sacrifice of holy Mass is paramount. In its formularies and in the texts of the Divine Office the effects of the Mass-mystery are fully given. At times the message rings clear and unmistakable, yet often much is left to our meditation; the liturgy would intimate its wealth to us, clothed in the garments of the history of salvation.

3. The Eschatological Plane is comprised of passages that treat of the end of time, of the parousia, of the next life, of heaven and hell. It is the consummation of the other two planes of liturgical activity, the end for which they exist and were providentially planned.

Advent affords a striking example of the interplay of these three planes. The texts of the liturgy express longing for the first coming of Christ in the flesh in terms of history. Always implied is Christ's coming in grace, a point often made explicit. In the mystery of the Mass the appearance of Christ upon the altar is awaited; the ultimate reference, however, is to His final coming at the end of time. Thus we can distinguish a threefold advent, although we cannot always unequivocally determine which one is intended in a particular liturgical reading. Sometimes all three may be possible. Stress may be put now on one, now on the other,

and often those presently praying are to determine the precise application. But it is exactly in this lively tension that liturgy is dramatic. To understand and distinguish these different areas of orientation is the first requirement for understanding the sacred texts. The second task is to apply this knowledge to daily life.

Now how are we to accomplish so fruitful a task? At the outset we must grasp one thing: the liturgy is primarily concerned with the present. The past and the future are only symbols or signposts of today's outpouring of grace. The chief function of the liturgy is to bring *us* divine life *now*. The present, however, may often be disguised in the raiment of the past or the future.

Returning to the liturgy of Advent, we notice that the texts speak at length about the first coming of Christ, the incarnation. Indeed we should gladly dwell on this event in grateful remembrance; and such reflection certainly has spiritual value. But it would be wrong to make Advent a sort of sentimental preview of Christmas, as is commonly done in civic and commercial centers. There is more to Advent-Christmas than a few ethical applications. True, we can no longer yearn for Christ's first coming since it is past. Nonetheless, we can put such desire in the service of grace. And through grace Christ comes to us in a manner symbolized by His first coming. His earthly life and work foreshadowed His work in the Church and in the soul. Every year, therefore, we should long for and prepare for His coming in grace, using the data or symbols of His first coming, His birth and infancy. For grace, although already within us, can come to us again and again and in fuller measure.

It is in the Mass that the liturgy attains its closest contact with the present. For in the Mass not only are the Body and Blood of Christ present, but the divine High Priest and Lamb of God appears on the altar, fulfilling there the symbols of His earthly life. Through the Eucharist history becomes present and hope becomes reality. The past and future become actual here before our eyes. What we read as past history and what we await as future hope merge into a holy *now* and a holy *today* in the Mass. It is of inestimable importance for the celebration and application

of the liturgy that in the mystery of the Mass we transpose to the present everything relating to past or future.

The early Church lived with the Second Coming of Christ constantly in mind. With the passing of centuries interest shifted to the present. Yet many eschatological texts are found in the liturgy. To be sure, the liturgy would not have us dream away the present and live only in the future. When it presents the final times to us, it wishes us to strip our hearts of fleeting earthly attachments and to anchor them where true joy is to be found. Hence the frequent repetition of the Lord's admonition to be ever watchful and ready for His coming. This, His final coming, is anticipated in the Mass-mystery now enacted. And it is its sure guarantee and pledge.

Holy Mass, therefore, is the focal point to which all phases of the liturgy converge. To return to our example of Advent: in the Mass the symbol of Christ's first coming takes on reality, His Second Coming is anticipated, and He comes to us in grace. Our soul becomes the scene of that threefold advent. He appears on the altar, visits us in Communion, and enlightens our darkness of soul through the glory and grace of His presence.

Liturgy then is no etherial intangible, it is absolute as birth and judgment and death. It is easier to deny life than grace. Our yearning for the coming of the newborn Child into the crib of our hearts is not empty sentiment; underlying it is the solid truth of the "new birth of the Only-begotten in the flesh." So, too, the Second Coming of Christ in power and glory is no pious daydream but a pledged reality through the Mass-mystery; for in the Christmas liturgy we joyfully and confidently approach our future Judge as well as God's only-begotten Son (Oration of the Vigil of Christmas). The sacramental interpretation of the Mass liturgy sees it as a veritable treasury of grace, the sun embodying and emitting all the rays proper to the work of redemption, be they commemorative, eschatological or sacramentally prognostic.

Through the liturgy, then, we receive our only true treasure, the precious pearl of divine life. The Church's year is indeed a year of grace.

THE LITURGICAL YEAR: A NEW EVALUATION

In the introduction to previous editions of this work we dealt systematically with the meaning of the liturgical year. But now we prefer to begin with a critical examination of a more basic question, namely, *is there a Church year?* There are so many things in life which we simply accept as certain without weighing the validity of their premises. Were we to investigate the principles upon which they stand, we should perhaps discover much that rests on very shaky foundations. This is true of the notion of a "Church year." We simply take it for granted, affixing its beginning to the first Sunday of Advent. Yet an examination of the liturgical sources would fail to support this view, for nowhere is mention made of a Church year, or, *a fortiori,* of Advent as its beginning.

We would first of all be forced to concede that the official liturgical books do not recognize the notion of a Church year. Not one liturgical text mentions it; in fact, we can go so far as to say that in liturgical parlance there really is no such expression. The ancients spoke of the "year's cycle," *circulus anni.* In the Breviary and Missal we find only the festal cycles and the *tempus per annum,* or ferial periods. There is no reference to a Church year. There is, however, a liturgical period which proceeds independently of the civil year while being co-extensive with it. Only insofar as this period unfolds itself within a civil year can we call it the Church year. But apart from this, the concept of a Church year as a specific period beginning with the first Sunday of Advent is a fabrication. It would be better in the future to speak of liturgical seasons or of festal seasons rather than of a liturgical year.

Next, we may ask, when do these seasons or festal periods begin and end? Formerly we shared the common view, maintaining as a matter of course that the Church year begins with the first Sunday of Advent. Were we, however, to seek a basis for this in the liturgy and study the books from beginning to end, we would not find the least intimation in support of the view. The liturgy of the Sundays after Pentecost yields no finis point. If we claim to see such in the Gospel about the end of the world, we should soon discover that this Gospel is rather a tie between the post-Pentecostal season and Advent, for on the first Sunday of Advent we hear the identical message.

Why then is Advent considered the beginning of the Church year? Firstly, because all Missals and Breviaries (and also the old sacramentaries) start with the first Sunday of Advent, or at least with Christmas — an indication that this view dates back to early times. And secondly, because of the transition, completed during the Middle Ages, from the sacramental or mystery approach to an intellectualistic and historical interpretation of the liturgy. In this transition Christmas as the birth of Christ came to be the beginning of the Church year. The next step was to circumscribe Jesus' entire historical life, and indeed the whole period since creation, within the framework of the solar year. Since then Advent has been considered the beginning of the Church year.

According to the historical outlook, then, the Church year begins with Advent, which to medieval liturgists represented the "four thousand years" before Christ, i.e., from the beginning of the world to the birth of Christ. The life of Jesus from His birth to His ascension and the descent of the Holy Spirit became the subject matter of the period between Christmas and Pentecost; the time after Pentecost was devoted to the period from the birth of the Church to the end of the world.

We feel obliged to point out that such symbolism, now commonly attached to Advent, is not to be found in the texts of the liturgy. True, the Book of Isaias is read, but the prophets are also read during November. And the fact that during the pre-

Lenten season we read about the three great patriarchs in the Book of Genesis is entirely overlooked because it does not fit into the design. Nor is the period from Christmas to Pentecost devoted exclusively to the historical life of Christ. The four last Sundays after Epiphany, the three Sundays before Lent, and the five Sundays of Lent do not follow the pattern. Finally, it is pure imagination to view the Sundays after Pentecost as representative of the epoch from the beginning of the Church to the end of the world; the liturgical sources do not yield this idea except that the last Sunday has an eschatological theme.

The Church year is sacramental in character and essence. It is governed by the law of grace similar to the way in which the seasons of the year harmonize with the natural rhythm of animate creation. According to this design, Septuagesima constitutes the great overture to the new season. The preceding season ended with the *Alleluia* at the *Benedicamus* of Saturday's Vespers. The Lessons at Matins begin with the first page of Holy Scripture: "In the beginning God made heaven and earth. . . ." The first three Sundays before Lent stand for the ages of the first three patriarchs, Adam, Noe, Abraham. Of course, they are also symbolical of the sacramental acts of Christ and the Church. It would be hard to find a more fitting and beautiful beginning for the Church year. The three Sundays of pre-Lent are of the same mould and present a unified program for the Christian life, viz., vocation, education, illumination.

After this noble introduction the chief work of the Church year commences, viz., the establishment and restoration of divine life in men. Such is the purpose of Lent. God invites us into His vineyard; we follow. He wants to sow; we are receptive soil. We are blind beggars; Christ enlightens us. Then comes Easter, the feast of feasts, renewing the sacraments within us and effecting our resurrection with Christ.

For the next fifty days we live in the childlike spirit of Easter, *quasi modo geniti infantes,* after which we receive the Pentecostal grace of Christian manhood from the Holy Spirit. This charge of grace should serve as the source of a dynamic Chris-

tian life, a life growing out of faith, out of love, out of hope. This is the purport of the Sundays after Pentecost. The liturgy of these Sundays constantly harks back to the Easter experience and thus gives incentive and direction to our growth in virtue. While the first Sundays stress the practice of charity, the later ones accent a life of faith.

In the last weeks the lofty theme of a "blessed hope" is highlighted. The autumn of the Church year is devoted to preparation for the end of life and to the Second Coming of Christ. The Sundays after Pentecost are known and loved for their simplicity of style and their fervent temper. It should now be clear how the season embracing Lent and Pentecost has the life of grace as its primary objective.

These findings throw new light on Advent. The triple distinction in Christ's coming — at Bethlehem, at the parousia, and in grace — had always been somewhat ambiguous. We can no longer prepare for His first coming since it is past. The Second Coming is wrapped in such obscurity that seldom did we dare speak of it. So, it seemed, emphasis was necessarily put on the third meaning, Christ's coming in grace. Now we more readily see the truth: Advent is really a *continuation of the Church's autumn season,* her preparation for the Savior's return. In this light Christmas and Epiphany are one great feast oriented to the parousia.

This is beautifully expressed in the Epistle of the first Mass of Christmas: *Exspectantes beatam spem et adventum gloriae magni Dei et Salvatoris nostri Jesu Christi,* "awaiting our blessed hope, that is, the glorious coming of the great God, our Savior Christ Jesus." "Awaiting our blessed hope," that is Advent; "the glorious coming of the great God" is Epiphany. Note that the Latin *adventus* corresponds to the Greek *epiphaneia.* The fulfillment of Advent, therefore, is Epiphany. Although Christmas is still predominantly historical, there is no mistaking Epiphany as a parousia feast, as "the glorious coming of the great God, our Savior Christ Jesus."

This conception of the Church year, or better, of the Church's

liturgical seasons, it must be admitted, is much more meaningful than the current historical interpretation. Furthermore, it was the outlook of the early Christians, an outlook in which the life of grace and the theme of hope predominated. Why then do *we* not proceed along the same sacramental line? I would be very willing to reconstruct the Church's year of grace according to this plan, beginning with Septuagesima. Then it would truly be a "year of grace," a year of supernatural life beginning with Easter and its preparatory season and concluding with the final union and marriage to Christ at Epiphany. But I shy away from this radical departure for fear that such a great breach of custom would only confuse. Further, our present Christmas liturgy is too strongly colored by historical considerations of Jesus' infancy and too little attentive to its eschatological import for me to venture to place the Advent-Epiphany period at the end of the Church year as a time devoted to the parousia. It would be especially difficult to meet the demands of the historical element in the Christmas feast if placed after Pentecost.

The history of the liturgical year is similar in many respects to the history of our venerable monastery, Klosterneuberg. Here is a structure of many parts, an album in which is recorded the style of each century of its existence. The original layout is still discernible, showing how the cloister and the rooms about it branch out from the church. The piecework of following generations eventually obscured the central feature; the main entrance was walled up and a new one made on another side. Other walls were built. Often the original layout was completely effaced by subsequent additions. Some quarters sadly witness the replacement of medieval architecture by baroque. But despite the changing times and styles, the purpose of the cloister has remained the same: to honor God and save souls.

Now the Church year has experienced a similar development. Its present structure is the result of nineteen hundred years of building. The main entrance (Septuagesima) has been closed off and a new door (first Sunday of Advent) has been made. It would be difficult, and, in fact, would do violence to the whole

structure to attempt a complete restoration of the original plan. So we shall retain the traditional division. The sacramental or mystery approach, however, can teach us important things. We should, for instance, speak in terms of liturgical seasons; and we could put less stress on Advent as the beginning of the Church year. Then, too, we could emphasize and cherish the mystery features of the liturgy's texts. Our greatest efforts, however, would be to make grace the focal point of all feasts and holy seasons. Perhaps some future generation will have the privilege of making the chronological adjustment needed to facilitate the sacramental evaluation of the Church's year of grace.

THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

Nature's annual cycle is characterized by two phenomena, light and life. Out of the darkness of night comes light; out of death comes life. The transition from night to light characterizes the winter season; the transition from death to life is proper to summertime. The holy year of the Church is likewise divided into two phases which have similar characteristics. Its winter phase, the Christmas cycle, is ruled by the Light symbol. Its three great feasts, Christmas, Epiphany, and Candlemas, are feasts of Light. In the summer phase, the Easter cycle, Life is victorious over death, in Christ as well as in all God's children. And as the winter and summer complement and succeed one another, so too the two festal cycles are co-ordinated to one another. The Easter cycle flows out of and back into the Christmas cycle, like the re-echoing of chimes.

Yet the two seasons are fully independent, each having its peculiar structure — a preparatory period, a feast climax, and a denouement. The preparatory period is a time of penance, a time when man prepares his heart for grace. The climax is the time when God gives the fullness of His grace. During the concluding period we are to turn the lessons of the mystery into practical, Christian modes of conduct.

We are now in the Christmas season, a time of beauty, tenderness, and drama, a time rich in graces for the soul. The Church and the soul are struggling through the darkness toward the Light. The longing and expectancy of Advent are feelings familiar to the heart of man. And the story of Jesus' infancy, together with its celebration within the Christian family, make this season the most lovable of the year.

But the liturgy would have us see beyond accidentals. What are we celebrating at Christmas? Christ's coming. Advent means coming. Epiphany, too, means coming or appearance. But which coming are we celebrating? We know there are three comings — the first in the flesh as Man; the second in majesty and glory on the last day; and the third in grace. Of the last one Christ said: "Whoever loves Me will keep My word and My Father will love him and We will come to him and make Our abode with him" (Jn. 14:23).

We may recall how the Church prepared us for the Second Coming of the Lord during the last months after Pentecost. It was a coming that we awaited with growing desire, yet not without dread. Finally, on the last Sunday, we met our King and Judge. So the autumn season of the Church year was a preparation for the parousia. But since the liturgy functions chiefly for immediate spiritual benefit, it makes the parousia a motive for moral reformation. Daily we should be living in the light of Christ's Second Coming.

How is this Second Coming related to Christmas? If we study the liturgy of the early Church, we will find that this season was a preparation for Christ's Second Coming. The very first Gospel of the Advent season deals with the end of the world. Again and again the liturgy portrays our Lord at His final appearance. The Epistle for Ember Saturday, for instance, refers to the parousia; the Collect of the Vigil of Christmas sees in our awaiting Christ's birth a symbol of our expectancy of His final return: "Grant that we who now joyfully receive Thine only-begotten Son as our Redeemer, may also without fear behold Him coming as our Judge." Epiphany, too, was originally a feast dedicated to the glorious coming of the Lord at the end of time.

Although this oldest stratum of the Church's liturgy has been largely obscured by the embellishments of later ages, we should note it carefully wherever it still appears.

In modern times the commemoration of our Savior's birth has become the main theme of the Christmas season. The dominant event of the whole season is Christ's first coming in the

flesh. Modern Christians have all but ignored the eschatological approach in stressing the historical fact. Each year our people await the birth of Christ as if it had not yet happened. However, because the liturgy is concerned not merely with history but principally with present reality, it continues to make Christ's first coming a symbol of His coming in grace, of His sacramental advent in the Sacrifice of holy Mass.

In summary we can say that the content of the Christmas cycle is the Savior's threefold advent. The liturgy recalls our Lord's historical coming, seeing in it a symbol of His coming in grace to our souls. At the same time it anticipates His final coming and prepares us for that eventuality. It is in the Mass that these three advents converge. These observations should help us in understanding the texts and in making our observance of the season more fruitful.

Note how the hymn for Advent Matins summarizes what we have been discussing:

First coming: Celestial Word, proceeding from
The Eternal Father's breast,
And in the end of ages come
To aid a world distressed:

Coming in grace: Enlighten, Lord, and set on fire
Our spirits with Thy love,
That, dead to earth, they may aspire
And live to joys above.

Second Coming: That, when the judgment-seat on high
Shall fix the sinner's doom,
And to the just a glad voice cry,
Come to your destined home;
Safe from the black and yawning lake
Of restless, endless pain,
We may the face of God partake,
The bliss of heaven attain.[1]

[1] Translation by Cardinal Newman.

Glancing through the Missal and Breviary, we can easily see how the liturgical texts depict God's threefold coming in a series of verbal pictures:

1. Historical. The theme of the incarnation runs throughout the entire season. During Advent we review the events preceding Christ's birth: His conception, the visitation, Joseph's hesitation. At Christmas: the birth of Christ, the adoration of the shepherds, the circumcision, and the remaining story of His childhood. After Epiphany: episodes from His later life. The life and work of St. John the Baptist also belong in the panorama showing our Lord's first coming.

2. Eschatological: the Second Coming. Here the scenes naturally are dark and obscure, for they are prophetic pictures of the future. We see "the King who comes from afar" and His return on the last day. Such indications appear often at the beginning of Advent, but as the season advances they give place to the more strictly historical episodes.

3. Symbolic. The Divine King visits Jerusalem, His Bride. During Advent we see the Bride prepare with growing eagerness for His visit and the divine nuptials. We hear the herald's call summoning us to take part in the reception and to sit at the bridal table. These scenes symbolize Christ's coming in grace. But we are not mere spectators; our souls are the Jerusalem to which the King comes, His bride whom He woos and weds.

With exquisite artistry the liturgy weaves these alternating scenes into one grand tapestry. Now the spotlight focuses on one, now on another. Often one picture will blend with the other. It is precisely this variation which gives the liturgy of the winter cycle so much beauty and drama. The subject provides ample food for the imagination, senses, and understanding.

We must see the entire winter cycle as a unit, as one grand feast beginning with dawn on the first Sunday of Advent ("It is now the hour for us to rise from sleep"), growing in brilliance like the sun at Christmas, reaching zenith at Epiphany, and finally setting at Candlemas. It is the glorious symbol of sun and light that gives this season its unity. All is centered on Christ,

the true Sun. Christmas really has no date historically, making the symbolism of the winter solstice, *sol invictus,* most appropriate. Advent is dawn; Christmas, the rising sun; Epiphany, high noonday; at Candlemas, the ruddy, sinking disc already foreshadows the Savior's death.

Perhaps, too, it would be helpful to see the entire Christmas cycle as a kind of mystery play; for its dramatic element ought not be overlooked. Following is an outline that could be developed further.

The Royal Nuptials of Heaven and Earth

A. The curtain rises. Preparation for the King's coming (Advent)
   I. He comes
      1. Vision from afar (first Sunday of Advent)
      2. Jerusalem prepares herself (second Sunday of Advent)
   II. Now He is near
      3. The joy of anticipation (third Sunday of Advent)
      4. The King puts on the clothes of a servant (Ember Days)
      5. Final preparation and longing call of the Bride ("O" antiphons)
      6. Before the eternal gates (Vigil of Christmas)

B. The King appears (Christmas)
   I. The King comes in servant's clothes (Christmas)
      1. His retinue: martyrs (Stephen), virgins (John), children (Holy Innocents)
      2. His glance toward the Cross (Sunday within the octave)
   II. In full glory the King celebrates His marriage to the Church (Epiphany)
      1. He receives His wedding guests (Magi)
      2. He purifies His Bride (baptism in the Jordan)
      3. He gives His wedding meal (second Sunday after Epiphany)
   III. The Bride prepares her chamber (Candlemas)

C. Epilogue. The King presides over His Kingdom (Sundays after Epiphany)
   1. As Teacher (first Sunday)
   2. As Priest (second Sunday)
   3. As Savior (third Sunday)
   4. As Conqueror (fourth Sunday)
   5. As Wise Judge (fifth Sunday)
   6. Growth of the Kingdom (sixth Sunday)

Such the holy drama of the Christmas cycle. Beneath it lies the sublime reality of Christ sharing His divine life with the Church His Bride. She shall "have Life, the fullness of Life." The entire cycle, therefore, is a glorious outpouring of Christ's grace upon the Church and upon each individual soul.

ADVENT: PREPARE FOR OUR SAVIOR'S COMING

As we pray first Vespers for the first Sunday of Advent, we are immediately struck by the remarkable difference in tone from the preceding post-Pentecostal liturgy. The latter was sober, prosaic; now there is buoyancy and high poetry. The very first antiphon, "In that day the mountains shall drop down sweetness . . .," indicates clearly that we are entering upon a season glad with hope and rich in doctrine, a time of expectancy, longing, and holy joy.

What does *Advent* mean? *Adventus Domini* means the "coming of the Lord." From what has already been said, we know that Advent is a season of preparation for the Lord's coming. The Roman Martyrology for this day puts it crisply: "The first Sunday of preparation for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ."

Advent accordingly is a time of preparation, a time of holy desire, longing and expectancy. If bodily food is to nourish us, we must feel hunger. Thus, too, we ought to hunger for God's

grace. According to a fundamental law of God's kingdom, God will not force His grace upon one who already is filled to satiety. "The hungry He fills with good things, and the rich He sends away empty." To make us worthy of the grace of redemption, holy Mother Church wants us to experience spiritual hunger and the need for redemption during these next four weeks. How, we may ask, does the Church arouse this spiritual hunger in our souls? In this she is a master. In spirit she places us before the first coming of Christ that we may experience vicariously in the sacred drama of the liturgy the spiritual desire and longing of certain most noble souls. At the same time she gives us a glimpse into the pedagogy by which God once prepared mankind for their Redeemer.

That preparation was threefold: (a) the entire Old Covenant served as a pedagogue unto Christ; (b) then when the fullness of time had come, God sent a special forerunner whose example and preaching readied the Jews for the Messiah; and finally (c) the eternal Father built for His Son à temple of precious stones, the body and soul of the immaculate Virgin. By such pedagogy God prepared men for the historical coming of Christ; it can now teach us how to await His coming to us in grace. Do you now understand why these three — the Old Testament, John the Baptist, and Mary — play such prominent roles during Advent?

a) Representative of the Old Testament is the Prophet Isaias. His message is twofold: on the one hand, the revelation of God; and on the other, man's longing for the Redeemer.

It would be an interesting and profitable project (one which might well be done during the long, dark evenings of Advent) to survey the whole Old Testament and to note the various messianic prophecies in an effort to see how they progress from a vague outline to an ever clearer, more meaningful and realistic picture. By such means God prepared men for their Redeemer. The revelation began with the protoevangel at the gates of paradise, with additions and clarification given to Noe, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon, and the prophets, especially Isaias.

Holy Mother Church has made this pattern of progressive revelation her own in the liturgy; it is her way of preparing us worthily for the great feast. This is clearly seen as the picture of Christ gradually comes to life during the weeks of Advent.

According to this pattern, the structure of Advent has two main parts, the first of which embraces the opening two weeks. During this period the Invitatory of the Divine Office hails Christ as the "King who is to come." From the third Sunday onward the Church intensifies her waiting: "Now the Lord is near."

During the first part we ascend two steps. The first Sunday announces: "The King is coming"; the second elaborates: "He is coming to Jerusalem," i.e., to the Church. The second part of the season breaks joyously upon us: "Rejoice, for the Lord is near." That is the initial step. The Ember Days constitute another step, bringing us to a new consideration: the Lord is coming *as man*. We hear His ancestry. The days of the O-antiphons, those days of most intense waiting, are a further step. At last on Christmas eve we stand before the gates through which the Savior enters the world.

This gradual and progressive revelation of the Redeemer, the pattern followed by God and the Church, must likewise become our personal pattern. Christ must shine forth in our souls ever more radiantly until we are prepared to behold His glorious countenance at the parousia.

Isaias is a worthy example of the best in the Old Testament, for he represents all the holy souls who longingly awaited their Redeemer. We pray that he may arouse this longing in our own hearts. Most appropriately has his cry, "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just; let the earth be opened and bud forth a Savior," become the best known Advent prayer of Christendom.

b) When I first began to live with the Church, it was difficult for me to understand why John the Baptist should play such a prominent role in Advent. As I then thought, he prepared men, not for the birth of Jesus, but for His public mission. But each year I realized more fully how the precursor clearly belongs to

Advent. His life, his preaching, and his person were truly a preparation for the coming of Christ. God constituted him the herald and forerunner of the Savior's advent in history; the Church designates him as the herald and forerunner of His advent in grace. Just as the Baptist called the Jewish people to repentance and conversion, so does he call us in today's liturgy: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" Advent is a time of conversion. His words, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His path; every valley shall be filled; every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall become straight," are an exhortation to genuine reformation of life.

c) It is a special sign of God's goodness and love that He projected the work of our salvation into a very human framework. The Redeemer was to be a child of man, subject to the exigencies of the natural order. He was to be conceived and born. All this shows how God was willing to meet us in the work of salvation, not as a dreadful deity, but truly as Emmanuel (God with us). Then, too, He chose a woman to collaborate with Himself. His plan was so touchingly wonderful that it is easily seen why the Church never loses sight of it. Continually she places before us the beautiful picture of the Mother with her divine Child. Does this help to understand why Mother Church wants us to observe Advent in a spirit like Mary's? Since Advent means preparation for receiving God's grace, who could be a better model than she who bodily contained and sheltered Him and was privileged to be a true Mother to Him? Yes, the mystery of Mary's divine Motherhood, the most perfect example of God's indwelling, demands an extensive role in this season's liturgy.

Isaias, John, and the Virgin Mary, therefore, present a most harmonious model for our observance of Advent — longing, repentance, and intimacy with God.

By resolving another difficulty the practical value of Advent is placed in sharp focus. Some persons wonder how we can "await the Lord." "How," good Christians ask, "are we to *await the Lord* when He has been with us and in us so long? How can we long for Him whom we daily have received into our hearts in

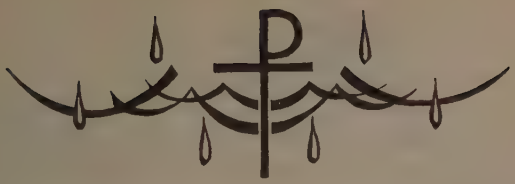
the Eucharist? Can the true Christian, in whom Christ lives, experience a genuine desire for His coming?" To these souls a practical and immediately applicable solution would be: although we cannot long for our Savior's advent in the flesh, we can long for His coming in grace. True, Christ appeared long ago. If we cannot foster a longing for His return, let us long for His kingdom and His grace which are ever "coming." Our Lord Himself gave us an Advent prayer, the *Our Father,* which serves for all times and for all men. *Adveniat regnum tuum* — Thy Kingdom *come.* It would almost appear that Advent took its name from this *Adveniat.* Advent is a second *Our Father,* a four-week prayer of longing for the extension of the kingdom of God.

Let us try to see more clearly the value of this season for our present and future life. Our most profound desire and fervent prayer should be that the kingdom of God may grow *numero et merito* (quantitatively and qualitatively) in souls and in the Church. Like the mustard seed in the Gospel it should become a mighty tree overshadowing all peoples of the earth. Like the leaven it should penetrate the Church and our souls.

What should we pray for during these four weeks? That this "kingdom of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love, and peace" (Preface of Christ the King), may embrace many more souls, both in pagan lands and in our own great cities; that it may fill and sanctify the individual Christian, the Christian family, priests, sisterhoods, countries and peoples everywhere with the power of its grace. And especially that it may dominate *my* soul and incite my whole being, reason, will, feeling, heart, and body.

May this zeal for souls engulf all, priests especially, but the laity too. Let us ask the great missionary St. Francis Xavier, whose feast is celebrated at the beginning of Advent, to share with us his hunger for souls, he who incessantly prayed *Da mihi animas*! Give me souls!

Surely, then, does holy Advent have great practical value. It disposes and makes us hungry for God.



THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Behold, the Name of the Lord comes from afar,
and His glory fills the whole world.
—First Vespers

1. Saturday Evening. The liturgy of the first week of Advent resembles a mighty arch spanning the gap between God and man. God is coming from afar, man raises his heart heavenwards and waits. These are the two poles of grace. The great day is dawning. In the hazy distance appears the promised King. "Come, let us adore the King who is approaching!" (Invitatory).

At Matins we pray a highly dramatic responsory, one which aptly voices the sentiments of our new season:

Long, long had I been watching.
Behold, now do I see God coming in power,
as in a cloud of light that covers the entire land.
Rush out to meet Him. Ask:
'Tell us, are You the One
to rule the people, Israel?'
All you, you men of dust,
All you, whether rich or poor,
Rush out to meet Him. Say:
'O Shepherd of Israel, please listen;
You who lead Joseph like a flock;
Tell us, are You the One?'
Gates, lift up your doors,

Eternal portals, open wide
That the King of glory may enter
To rule the people, Israel.

Equally apt and expressive is the theme psalm (24) of tomorrow's Mass. Pray it frequently during the coming week:

To you do I lift up my soul, O Lord my God,
in you do I trust.
Let me not ask in vain,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.
For no one who awaits you is abandoned,
but whoever is unfaithful is put to shame.
Show me, O Lord, your ways,
teach me to walk in your paths.
Let me walk in your truth; teach me,
for you are my God and Savior.
In you do I trust the whole day;
remember me in your mercy, O God.

2. Vespers. It is a solemn, stirring moment as we begin first Vespers of the Advent season. Like a lovely overture today's Vespers intimate the consummate beauty of the Advent-Christmas season. The hour suggests all the main themes of Advent's first week. The five initial antiphons should not be passed over lightly; well might they resound in our ears throughout the week. These key sentences will be repeated four times — at both Vespers, at Lauds, and at the Little Hours. Furthermore, they will be said daily during the ensuing week from Prime to None. To live, think, and pray in the spirit of Advent, nothing could be recommended more highly than to repeat these antiphons again and again.

1. In that day the mountains shall drop down sweetness, and the hills shall flow with milk and honey, alleluia.

2. Rejoice, O daughter of Sion, shout with joy, O daughter of Jerusalem, alleluia.

3. Behold, the Lord shall come and with Him all His saints; and in that day there shall be a great light, alleluia.

4. All you who thirst, come to the waters; seek the Lord while He may be found, alleluia.

5. Behold, there shall come a great Prophet, and He shall establish a new Jerusalem, alleluia.

What joy and gladness well up from these verses! It is abundantly evident that Advent is the time of glad tidings.

Ant. 1. "In that day," viz., the day of salvation which the liturgy identifies with Christmas, for the birth of Christ is indeed the beginning of redemption. On Christmas the Church sings: "Today the skies drop down sweetness throughout the whole world" (2. Resp.). Grace is here pictured in terms of the fruitfulness of the Promised Land. We Christians know what is meant: the kingdom of God in our souls and in the Church, i.e., grace lavishly given in response to our fervent plea, *Adveniat regnum tuum!*

Note how each antiphon concludes with *alleluia,* the Church's acclamation of joy par excellence. Ordinarily it is only in the Easter season that the liturgy allows *alleluia* to be consistently added. What a contrast there is between Advent and Lent! During the latter the *alleluia* is completely silenced; now it occurs after every antiphon, for this is a time of joy, a time of happy expectation. Then, too, the *alleluia* is the song gloriously resounding through the streets of the heavenly Jerusalem; which turns our thoughts to final times. It is really worthwhile to note carefully the various eschatological indications in the liturgy of Advent. Only in heaven will the kingdom of God be made manifest in all its loveliness.

Ant. 2. The Church and the soul are told to rejoice. Does the kingdom of God really make us happier than anything else? Do not earthly joys and goods have a stronger attraction? How can we long for the kingdom of God if we do not treasure its riches above everything else?

Ant. 3. The third antiphon is strictly eschatological. It is the Last Day; the Lord appears in power and glory with the saints

of all ages in His company. This is the final and most important coming of the Lord. The great light that begins to rise is the heavenly Jerusalem, eternal happiness. That is the great Christmas for which our whole life is a preparation, an Advent.

Ant. 4. Now the liturgy strikes a new chord. The mood is almost Lenten. For Advent too is a time of introspection and conversion. It is profitable to go to the font of salvation and to drink there. God is nearer than ever before. Now is the time of grace, and our hearts must desire it.

Ant. 5. Christ, the great Prophet, approaches. He comes to restore Jerusalem, the Church (and the soul), to make it new, heavenly.

In the Chapter we hear the most important sentence in tomorrow's Epistle: "Brethren, you know that already the moment for us to rise from sleep has come; for now our salvation is nearer than when we became believers." The great day of redemption is about to dawn. A good choice was made for the *Magnificat antiphon*. In the distance we see our Savior: "Behold, the Name of the Lord comes from afar, and His glory fills the whole world" (the Name stands for the Person).

FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Station at St. Mary Major

Already the moment to rise from sleep has come!

1. The Night Vigil. During the nights of Advent, the longest of the year, the Church prays her true Advent prayer, Matins. The ancient vigil was prompted by common expectancy of the Lord's return, be it in the celebration of the mysteries or at the parousia. On the Sundays of Advent, Matins have proper antiphons, which echo the thoughts advanced at Vespers. With a ring of joyful confidence these antiphons keep proclaiming the glad tidings. Certainly it would be worthwhile to ponder over

them and to examine their contents. "Behold, I am coming soon and am bringing My reward with Me, says the Lord. I shall repay each according to his works." — "Let the hearts of men be cleansed for the coming of the great King, for we must meet Him worthily. See, He indeed is coming, He does not tarry." It is as if God and man were journeying to meet each other.

During the nights of Advent the Lessons are taken from the prophet Isaias. He is the authorized Advent preacher during all four weeks, both because he most clearly sketches the Redeemer and because he best voices mankind's longing for redemption. Deservedly is he called the "prince of prophets" and the "Old Testament evangelist." His words should echo in our souls. He preaches repentance, urges reformation of morals. In tonight's first Lesson God severely censures His people. The Church speaks to us in these words once addressed to the Jews by the prophet. God's slighted love astounds heaven and earth. The lesson sounds like a re-echo of the divine curse in paradise (Is. 1:1–9):

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth, for the Lord speaks:
I nourished sons and reared them, but now they despise me.
The ox knows his master and the ass his owner's crib,
while Israel knows me not; my people remain ignorant.
Woe to you, sinful nation, burdened with iniquity!
A wicked seed, children of corruption,
you forsake the Lord, you scorn the Holy One of Israel.
Where else shall I strike you, if you continue to sin?
The whole head is sick, the whole heart faint.
From the sole of the foot to the crown of the head there is nothing sound; nothing but sores and wounds and bruises that have not been bound or dressed or soothed with oil.
Your country is desolate, your cities burned with fire;
your land strangers devour before your face.
Only the daughter of Sion remains, like a cot in a vineyard,
like a lodge in a cucumber garden, like a lone tower.
If the Lord of hosts leaves not some seed,
we will become like Sodom and Gomorrha.

These are stern words which, like today's Epistle, move us to change our way of life.

Let us not overlook the grand responsories of Advent Matins. Couched in sublime poetry, they quickly arouse genuine Advent sentiments.

> It was a vision by night. I looked and saw:
> On the clouds of heaven the Son of Man was coming.
> To Him were given kingdom and honor;
> all peoples, nations, and tongues were serving Him.
> His power is everlasting, it shall never be taken from Him,
> nor shall His Kingdom ever be destroyed.

2. Holy Mass (Ad te levavi). Today's concise and austere Mass formulary must date to ancient times. It presents us with an ideal Advent message (*Gosp.*), an ideal Advent exhortation (*Ep.*), and an ideal Advent prayer (*Intr.*, *Coll.*). To the announcement of the Lord's coming the Church responds befittingly.

We enter the house of God. Mary, God's Mother, is preparing the crib in which to lay her Son; she comes to meet us. What a beautiful model of preparation! The stational church is St. Mary Major at the Crib and its stational Saint meets us! Already on this first day of our preparation for Christmas, we see the Mother of God at the crib! Mary now leads us to the altar, where she speaks to us and leads us in prayer. How fervently does the *Introit* fall from her lips: "To You do I lift up my soul, O Lord my God; in You do I trust . . . for no one who awaits You is abandoned." Mary, the Mother of God, can well teach us how to prepare.

Next we sing the *Kyrie*, the exile song of God's children, our song of longing. Precisely during this season should we use it to express our need for redemption. The *Gloria* is omitted and will not be sung until the holy night of Christmas. Presently the Church stretches out her arms for the *Collect;* it is a typical Advent prayer beginning with *Excita* (Stir up . . .). In contrast to the stately and measured Collects of the post-Pentecostal

season, this one is spirited, impetuous. Emphasis is centered on the word *Come.* Note that the prayer is addressed directly to Christ, like the ancient *Maranatha,* i.e., Come, Lord! Why should He come? To redeem. "Come to redeem us from sin and punishment."

In the *Lesson* Mary reappears to instruct us. These are glorious words, especially when from the lips of Mary. The day of salvation has dawned. Till now deep night covered the earth, men were slumbering in the darkness of sin. But now dawn is breaking; the King is near. He summons His watching soldiers to battle. Mary speaks: Put on the armor of light; put on the Lord Jesus as I have put Him on. In the *Gospel* Jesus appears in power and glory, a speedy answer to our *Excita.* We look and raise up "our heads, for our salvation is near." During the Middle Ages the famous sequence *Dies Irae* was sung before the Gospel today, certainly a more appropriate place for it than in the Requiem Mass. The Gospel homily given in part in the Breviary was delivered in today's station church by Pope St. Gregory the Great.

Action now follows words, both on God's part and on ours. As proof that our offering is more than mere lip service, we give ourselves under the symbol of the Offertory gifts, accompanying the act with holy longing. For the *Offertory* is the prayer service of the Foremass transposed into action. On God's part it means the giving of grace, an operation similar to that described by His Word in the Gospel. Today the coming of Christ in grace is preliminary and partial, but it is real and prepares us for the greater advent of grace at Christmas (*Postc.*). In classic brevity, the *Secret* expresses basic truths: the wonderful power of the holy Sacrifice should purify us and make us worthy to receive the original Offerer, Christ. Note, too, the *Communion* prayer taken from Psalm 47: "Let us receive Your mercy, O Lord, in the midst of Your temple." Like Simeon we kneel in God's house with outstretched arms waiting for divine "Mercy" (become Man) to be laid in our arms. With such sentiments we begin this festal cycle; at its conclusion, February 2, we will pray

the same verse from the Psalm: "We have received Your mercy . . ." (*Intr.*). Thus it is a verse that spans the whole season from the first Sunday of Advent to the feast of the Purification.

The holy Sacrifice should whet our desire for the Lord. It should be a seed buried in fertile soil that brings forth manifold fruits at Christmas (*Comm.*). Our hearts should become both God's *crib* and God's *mother*.

Notice that Psalm 24 is used whenever it is a matter of expressing human longing (*Intr.*, *Grad.*, *Off.*); but Psalm 84, the Christmas psalm, serves as the medium to express God's reply through His coming (*All.*, *Comm.*). The import of this Sunday is therefore: Christ is coming; but He demands our putting off of the old man and putting on the new — even Himself. Prepared, we go to meet Him.

3. Mary in Today's Liturgy. We have already observed the intimate relationship between the Mother of God and the Advent season. She is the highest expression, the perfect model of true Advent spirit. On this account do we begin our Advent observance in the great Marian Church *Ad praesepe*, at the crib. To the Christians of Rome this church was Bethlehem. In 342 A.D. it was built to commemorate the Council of Ephesus, and dedicated to the Mother of God. Most appropriately are services held here six times during the current season.

To follow Mary's footsteps through the liturgy of the first Sunday of Advent would prove spiritually profitable and inspiring. We have already tried to celebrate holy Mass under her guidance. In addition to the observations already made, attentive reading will find a reference to the Mother of God in the Communion verse. What does the liturgy mean by "our land" which "brings forth its Fruit"? In the first place, it is the land of the Church (and of the soul), which produces the fruit of redemption in the sacrificial repast. But surely the Church is thinking of her prototype, the Blessed among women, and of the "Fruit of her womb." It is precisely through the Mass that we become like Mary in her dignity as Mother of God. For we too are allowed to receive the Lord and shelter Him that He may be

formed in us and that we may show Him to the world at Christmas.

The Church sings and speaks of Mary even more clearly in her Divine Office. At Matins no less than three responsories are devoted to the Mother of God. While the first two behold the coming Lord "in a vision by night," the next two dwell upon the annunciation: "The Angel Gabriel was sent . . ," and "Hail, Mary. . . ." "Mary replied: What sort of greeting is this? My soul is dismayed; am *I* to give birth to the King, who will not harm my virginity?" (Ant. at Matins). Thus already on the first Sunday of Advent the Church sings the praises of Mary.

It is also noteworthy that the Benedictus and Magnificat antiphons both concern the Mother of God. At sunrise we sing: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, Mary. Do not fear; you will bear in your womb the Son of God, alleluia." And at sundown: "Do not fear, Mary; you have found grace with the Lord. Behold, you will conceive and bring forth a Son, alleluia."

Our best model for the Advent-Christmas season is, surely, Mary our Mother.

MONDAY IN THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

What a harlot has the faithful city become!

1. Scripture Reading. At Matins we read another stern admonition of the prophet Isaias to do penance. He is speaking to Jerusalem and to the Jewish people; the liturgy addresses his words to the Church and to us (Is. 1:16–28). This lesson falls in line with yesterday's Epistle and should touch us equally deep. Before we pray *Adveniat regnum tuum*, Thy kingdom come, the temple of our soul must be purified of evil spirits. This is the import of the excerpt. Advent includes spiritual reformation, change of heart. Listen to the sobering words of the prophet:

Wash yourselves, become clean;
clear away your evil practices from my eyes.
Stop doing evil, learn to do good.
Promote justice, help the oppressed;
obtain justice for the orphan, protection for the widow—
then come and plead with me, says the Lord.
Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall become white as snow;
though they be red as crimson, they shall become white as wool.
If you are willing and obedient, you shall enjoy the good of the land.
But if you are stubborn and provoke me to anger,
the sword shall devour you.
The mouth of the Lord has spoken.

Truly it is so: in our hands lie life and death. The choice is ours. Choose life!

Next we read a lamentation over God's unfaithful Spouse, Jerusalem. It is the reverse of *adveniat regnum tuum*, a divine complaint against my unfaithful soul, God's city, God's bride.

What a harlot has the faithful city, the city renowned for justice, become!
Justice used to lodge in it, but now murderers.
Your silver is turned to dross, your wine, water-diluted.
Your princes have become rebels, companions to thieves;
they all love bribes and chase after gifts.
The rights of orphans they do not uphold,
nor plead in cases for widows.
Therefore, says Yahweh, the God of hosts, the Strong One of Israel:
'Ah, I will take vengeance on my enemies,
I will vent my wrath upon my foes.
I will turn my hand against you,
and destroy every rebel.

Your dross I will clean purge as with lye,
separating and rejecting the lead.
I will restore to you judges as formerly,
and counsellors as at the beginning.
After this you shall again be called:
'The City of the Just,' 'The faithful city.'
Sion will be redeemed through righteousness,
her penitents through justice.
But evildoers and sinners will be destroyed;
all they who forsake the Lord will perish.'

Note how the liturgy strikes its most serious motif at the very outset — Advent penance.

2. **Responsories.** The responsories are cast in a more positive and joyous tone than the lessons. The first tells of Mary; the second is a song of joy over the Savior's coming; while the third combines the stern spirit of the lessons with gladness over the prospect of redemption.

Receive, O Virgin Mary, receive the word of the Lord
brought to you by His angel:
You will conceive and bring forth
God as well as Man.
You will be called: Blessed among all women.
You will bear a son, but remain a virgin undefiled.
You will conceive, and be a Mother still unspotted.

The second responsory is a song jubilant over the advent of grace:

Let heaven rejoice, let earth shout with gladness.
Sing loudly, O mountains, for our Lord will come
and will have mercy on His poor.
His days shall witness the rise of justice and much peace.
No longer shall the unclean walk about Jerusalem;
for in that day the mountains shall drip sweetness
and the hills flow with milk and honey, says the Lord.
God shall come from Lebanon,
the Holy One from the dark and shady mountain.

At sunrise the Church rings the Angelus bell: "The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary, and she conceived of the Holy Spirit, alleluia" (*Ben. Ant.*). At sunset it is a word of comfort to captive Jerusalem: "Lift up your eyes, Jerusalem, and see how mighty is your King. Behold, your Savior comes to loose you from your chains."

If we now attempt to piece together a mosaic from the lessons and responsories, two contrasting themes become evident. The one is dark and gruesome: God's unfaithful bride, a soul estranged and lacking grace; the other is bright and appealing: God's glorious kingdom, souls in intimate union with Him. But these strains are not irreconcilably opposed, since the unfaithful soul is destined for God's kingdom. Therefore, again and again we hear the divine solicitations of Jesus the Bridegroom rather than the condemnation of Christ the Judge. Furthermore, between the opposing elements there shines through the vision of our Virgin Mother, Mary, the chiefest model in Advent preparation.

3. **Living in the Spirit of Advent.** At no season is home life more in honor than during Advent. Some will recall how as children they were led to the parish church by mother's hand. It was still dark outside when men and women treaded through snow and cold to the brightly illuminated House of God. As the choir burst forth in the *Rorate*, one felt sure that Christmas was near.

Advent, too, could well become the most fruitful time of the year for our spiritual lives. Its union of longing, joy, and holy seriousness have a greater appeal to the human heart than Lent. To keep Advent well, I would stress these three points: (a) Lovingly preserve its characteristic spirit. It is one of peace and calm, well adapted to self-examination and interior reflection. During this last month before the birth of Jesus, keep the holy Virgin before you as your model; look into her heart and note her thoughts and sentiments.

Advent is a season of song. Mother Church offers heartwarming melodies in abundance. Encourage Advent songs, both popular and liturgical. Harness your physical and spiritual pow-

ers to foster Advent thoughts and themes. The liturgy offers many leads. Read the Book of Isaias. The Introits of the Advent Masses and the beautiful responsories await your utilization. Associate much with children because their preparations for the Christ Child often contain subtle but true expressions of Advent longing. Be anxious to see Advent pictures; fill your ears with Advent words, Advent sounds, Advent stories, and Advent songs. Keep to an Advent schedule with earlier rising and Advent Mass.

b) The evening hours of Advent. At this season nature is enveloped in mist and darkness. The ever longer nights, a symbol of Advent in themselves, have a peculiar, homey character, most conducive to enkindling the proper liturgical spirit. The members of the family remain together or there are small gatherings. Advent hymns are sung; the prophet Isaias is read. In many places there are traditional customs such as that associated with the Advent wreath, with its candles lighted in stepwise progression. An evening spent in this way by the family or with friends proves very inspirational.[1]

c) Daily attendance at holy Mass.

TUESDAY IN THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Let us walk in the light of the Lord

1. Scripture Reading. Again at Matins God speaks to us through His Advent prophet, Isaias (Is. 2:1–19). But today the opening unit tells a joyful message, the glory of the messianic kingdom (2:2–5).

> At the end of days
> the mountain of the Lord's house will be firmly
> established on the highest mountain top,
> exalted above every hill.

[1] An excellent aid in observing Advent in the church, home, and school is *Family Advent Customs* by Helen McLoughlin. Available from the Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minn.

All nations will stream to it,
many peoples will journey thither saying:
'Come, let us go to the mountain of the Lord,
to the house of the God of Jacob.
He will teach us his ways,
and we will walk in his paths!'
For Law goes forth from Sion,
and Yahweh's word from Jerusalem;
He will render judgment among the nations,
he will judge justly many peoples.
Swords will be beaten into ploughshares,
spears into pruning-hooks.
No longer will nation rise against nation,
or resort thenceforth to war.
Come, house of Jacob,
let us walk in the light of the Lord.

This messianic passage harmonizes perfectly with our Advent theme, *adveniat regnum tuum*. It proclaims that Jerusalem is the birthplace of the Church, that the Church unites all peoples, that she is the teacher of men, and that a kingdom of peace will be established upon earth. We must, however, cooperate in establishing this kingdom of peace in our souls. For through grace the kingdom of God exists within us. The conversion of swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning-hooks, an eventuality attained only to the extent nations accept Christ, can and must happen in our hearts. As St. Paul said: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). If the kingdom of God is a kingdom of peace, then we must become peace promoters.

Our Scripture reading continues with an Advent warning, a gripping proclamation of divine judgment (2:6–18):

You have forsaken your people, the house of Jacob.
(because) their land is full of silver and gold.
their treasures countless.
Their land is full of horses,
their chariots without number.

Anxiously am I
awaiting the Lord,
expecting God,
my Savior +

Their land is full of idols,
their images without end.
The work of their own hands they adore,
that which their own fingers have fashioned.
Crawl into the holes of the rocks, hide yourselves in the dust,
in fear of the Lord and the glory of his dreadful majesty.
Then will the pride of men be humbled, their arrogance brought low;
for in that day the Lord alone will be exalted.
Truly a day is coming, a day when the Lord of hosts will come
against all who are proud and haughty,
against all the cedars of Lebanon and all the oaks of Bashan;
against every high mountain,
against every lofty hill,
against every high tower,
against every fortified wall,
against all the ships of Tarshish,
against all precious adornment.
Then will the pride of men be humbled, their arrogance brought low;
for in that day the Lord alone will be exalted.

What a soul-shaking contrast to the previous lesson is this judgment upon the great and mighty ones of the world! Still it should be comforting to us, Christ's "little ones." How important to cull from our souls all that is of the world. We should think of the eight beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. The kingdom of heaven cannot grant entrance to souls laden with the idols of the world.

2. Responsories. God approaches man with glad tidings and with admonitions to repentance. Man approaches God through longing and desire for grace. The Church gives expression to these truths in today's responsories.

O mountains of Israel, spread out your branches,
blossom and bring forth fruit;
for the day of the Lord is coming fast.
Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain the Just One;
let the earth open and bring forth the Savior.

Let the mountains drip sweetness and the hills righteousness,
for the Lord, the Light of the world, is coming with power.
And Law will go forth from Sion,
the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

The precious moments of the sun's rising are a fitting time to remember her who brought us this Light, the "Dayspring from on high," Mary: "Before they came together, Mary was found with child of the Holy Spirit, alleluia" (*Ben. Ant.*). At sunset the Church admonishes us to make good use of these days of grace: "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call to Him while He is near, alleluia" (*Magn. Ant.*).

To summarize the main ideas of today's liturgy: on God's part, glad tidings and the call to repentance; on our part, longing and moral reform. The resplendent picture of the kingdom of God and of grace should inflame our desire — *adveniat regnum tuum*! The impressive plea to repent should move us to search our hearts. *Seek the Lord while He may be found*!

3. The Rorate Mass is a votive Mass in honor of the Blessed Virgin proper to Advent. It is the first of the five Marian Masses given at the end of the Commons in the Missal. Actually, it is a simplified form of the "Golden Mass," *missa aurea*, on Ember Wednesday, and therefore a Mass which very clearly expresses the themes of Advent. Here again Mary shows herself as our leader through Advent to Christmas. A beautiful symbolism is associated with the Rorate Mass. Through the snow and cold and darkness of early morn the faithful trudge to the brightly

lit church, where the priest appears in white vestments to offer the holy Sacrifice. "Rain down, O heavens, the Just One" (the Mass takes its name, Rorate, from these first words). It is Isaias who meets us here at the threshold, giving voice to the world's yearning for a Redeemer.

The *Kyrie* merits special attention; it is our daily Advent cry — this longing, plaintiff plea of mankind in need of redemption. At the *Dominis vobiscum* we should think of the angel Gabriel's words, "the Lord is with thee"; such association provides a better insight into the profound meaning of the greeting, viz., may the Lord be with you as He was with Mary. It also casts our veneration of Mary during Advent in a new light: Mary is our model of the divine indwelling through grace. The Christian participates in the dignity of the Divine Motherhood; he must form the Son of God in himself and bring Him to the world with Mary at Christmas. Accordingly almost every part of the Mass speaks of the approaching birth of Jesus and of Mary's role in it. The Introit already had said: Mary is the fruitful earth covered with dew from heaven which is to open and bring forth the Savior. And its versicle is taken from our Advent psalm (84), which introduced us to the joy of Christmas. God has blessed the land in the womb of His Mother; soon "the Lord will bestow blessing and our land will bring forth its fruit."

Isaias' prophecy involving the virginal birth of the Savior is the topic of the *Epistle*. To the Savior is given the symbolic name Emmanuel, i.e., God with us. In its fullness "Emmanuel" first happened to Mary, now to us in varying degree through grace. Precisely in the Mass does Christ become "God with us," a fact that makes daily attendance such an excellent Advent exercise. At the *Gradual* we wait for the eternal gates to open for the "King of glory." The *Alleluia*, like an *Angelus* before the Gospel, makes clear who is to open these gates: Mary, the pure Virgin.

The *Gospel* enacts the sublime annunciation scene. Thus Epistle and Gospel are related to each other as promise and fulfillment. Mary gives her *fiat*: I am the handmaid of the Lord! That

was the great moment when the Son of God became man, a moment which Christianity recalls by the words: "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." To some degree this event is realized in us at holy Mass. In the Foremass a messenger appears and relates to us the word of God (viz., the Epistle, Gospel, and sermon). What does he tell us? The glad tidings of Emmanuel — that we become, in a sense, the mother of God by fulfilling His will. "He who does the will of My Father is My brother and My sister and My mother" (Mk. 3:35).

As we present our gifts at the *Offertory*, Mary serves as our model of self-surrender. Her words, "I am the handmaid of the Lord," teach us the great lesson of willing self-oblation. Christ comes upon the altar in the Sacrifice, and in the Eucharist He comes into our hearts, just as He descended into the Virgin's womb. In both instances "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." Christ truly becomes "Emmanuel" in the Eucharist. Who could ever have imagined that God would be so near to us, even to become our Food? The *Postcommunion* forms a final link with the Gospel, uniting the three great events in the life of Jesus, conception, death, and resurrection. The Rorate Mass certainly abounds with Advent themes as it shows us Mary, God's Mother, the sublimest model for souls divinely favored.

WEDNESDAY IN THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

An Advent petition: Give us good leaders and holy women, Lord

1. Scripture Reading. Today's message is again comminatory (Is. 3:1—4:1). The third chapter of Isaias consists of two dire pronouncements: divine judgment against the corrupt leaders of the people (3:1–15) and against wanton women (3:16—4:1). Final judgment hovers like the distant approach of a thunderstorm, to unleash itself in mighty fury (Gospel). "He came unto His own and His own received Him not" — such is the tragedy

of Advent. The first oracle is spoken against the leaders of the people:

Behold, the Lord of hosts will take away from Jerusalem and
Judah the warrior trained for battle, the judge, the prophet,
the ancient, the captain of fifty, the dignitary, the counsellor,
the wise and prudent man,
and will make children their princes, boys their rulers.
Each will plague his neighbor; and youths will domineer over
their elders.
A man will constrain his brother and say: 'You have a mantle;
so be our ruler.'
And he will answer: 'I am no healer, neither is there enough
bread and clothing in my house.'
Jerusalem is ruined and Judah fallen
because their words and deeds go against Lord,
provoking his glorious presence . . . .
The Lord rises up to do battle, he rises up to judge the people.
He brings to judgment the ancients and the princes of his people:
You, yes, you have despoiled the vineyard,
by robbing the poor you have filled your houses.
What has possessed you,
that you ruin my people and grind the poor to pieces?

The second section describes the ways of wanton women:

The Lord of hosts says:
Because the daughters of Sion are proud,
because they stalk about with outstretched necks and ogling
eyes,
mincing along with jingling feet —
The Lord will smite their heads with baldness and expose their
brows;
He will take away their spangles, their forehead bands, their
half-moons, and their ear rings and bracelets and bonnets,
their headbands, stepchains, and shiny sashes,
their perfume bottles and amulettes,

their finger rings and their nose rings,
their gowns, their cloaks, their mantles, their tiny purses,
their polished mirrors and gaudy chemisettes,
and their turbans and diaphanous veils.
Then, instead of fragrance, there will be stench,
instead of a sash, a rope,
instead of curled hair, baldness,
instead of tailored gowns, a sackcloth.
Her men will fall by the sword, her valiant heroes in battle,
and her gates will sadly mourn, while Sion lay ravaged and desolate.
And seven women will cling to one man, saying:
we will furnish our own bread and provide our own clothes,
if only you let us come under your name and free us from reproach.

This is an unusually realistic description of the evils current in eighth-century Jerusalem. Judah's princes and her women contributed greatly to the fall of their nation. Did not the prophet throw some light on our times? Our leaders and our women too contribute their share to the spiritual ills of mankind. The censure, then, should not surprise us. If the kingdom of God is to be ours, the way must be made ready. If the Physician of souls is to come, our sores must be recognized. But let us try to bring out the positive side to the censure. In our Advent *Kyrie* we will include this petition: You who are coming, give us good leaders and worthy women. Our two great models, Christ and His Mother, can keep a people healthy and inspire them to heights of virtue.

2. The Responsories. The Church awaits the Redeemer with heartfelt longing:

Christ our King is coming!
He is the Lamb whom John announced would come —
the Lamb before whom kings would stand with closed mouths,
and Gentiles would adore.

Long, long ago Ezechiel uttered this prophecy:
'I saw a closed door.
And lo, God eternal passed through it for the world's salvation!
And it was closed again.'
It was a figure of the Virgin,
who with child-birth remained a Virgin still.
Through that door you saw, the Lord alone shall pass.

The responsories, we see, tell of the Messiah, describing both His exterior lowliness as the Lamb, the Son of the Virgin, and His majesty as King of the earth and eternal God, the wise Lawgiver and righteous Judge.

In the morning the Church proclaims: "Law goes forth from Sion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (*Ben. Ant.*). In the evening we hear the Baptist: "There comes after me One mightier than I, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to loose" (*Magn. Ant.*). Today marks the initial appearance of John the Baptist; henceforth he will accompany us through Advent as the repentance preacher.

For a composite picture of today's liturgy, we could begin with points from the Breviary lessons. The oracles from Isaias could serve as the dark background, while the responsories would portray the Leader and the Woman par excellence, Christ and Mary. Christ leads the way whatever the goal, and we must follow step by step. And Mary, Mother of God and Virgin, serves as the perfect exemplar for the women of every age.

3. Advent Psalms. Liturgy means communion with God. Yet it is not a unilateral affair; both God and man must act. God "comes," or "appears"; while man "goes forth to meet" Him. This bilateral movement is very beautifully and dramatically developed during the Christmas cycle, especially in Advent. Do we not see the Lord approaching? Yet the liturgy controls the progress with masterful ingenuity.

Man on his part goes to meet the Lord. Here, too, we notice a progression. This, the human element, is expressed by the psalms. During Advent the Church makes repeated use of four

psalms: 24, 79, 84, and 18; together they provide, in four steps, the record of man's progress as it finds expression in the Introits of the four Sundays of Advent. Psalm 24 dominates the entire Mass of the first Sunday, a sure indication of an ancient composition. During this first week we should live and sing this psalm of trust in God, of expectancy, of penitence, of desire for help. First let us read it, slowly, meditatively:

Introduction, vv. 1–3

To you, O Lord, I lift my soul;
in you, my God, I trust — I shall never be put to shame.
Never should my enemies mock me,
because one who hopes in you is never disappointed.
But they will blush for shame —
deceitful evildoers.

Plea for guidance and pardon, vv. 4–11

Show me your ways, O Lord,
and teach me to walk in your paths.
Guide me, and teach me the way of truth,
for you are the God who saves.
In you do I trust the whole day.
Remember, Lord, your kindness
and your mercy which are of old.
Forget the sins of my youth and all my follies;
in your great kindness remember me,
remember me, Lord, in your mercy.
The Lord is good and faithful;
therefore he shows sinners the right way.
The lowly he directs to justice,
to the poor he points out his paths.
The way of the Lord is mercy and fidelity
toward all who keep his covenant and his Law.
For your Name's sake, Lord, forgive my guilt,
because it is great.

In the Hebrew original, Psalm 24 is alphabetical, i.e., each of the twenty-two verses begins with a successive letter of the alphabet. Such psalms (and they occur frequently in the Bible) tend to have a loose train of thought. The verses are pithy and follow one another like pearls on a string. This is true here. For the following observations we need not give the entire psalm. The above section prays smoothly as it is. Some verses can be used as ejaculatory prayers.

Psalm 24 is easily applied to Advent since its theme is typical of the season, "hope for redemption." It is designedly woven into the Introit, Gradual, and Offertory of the Mass for the first Sunday of Advent because it contains all the required motifs. It breathes confidence and hope; it expresses longing and desire for help, sorrow and repentance. Verses with a special Advent slant are accorded prominence in the Mass: "To You, O Lord, I lift my soul; in You, my God, I trust . . . because one who hopes in You is never disappointed." "Show me Your ways, O Lord, and teach me to walk in Your paths. . . ." Thus we can use this psalm to express our preparation and our longing. We develop a love for the psalms only by praying them over and over; soon they penetrate the soul like a lovely hymn. Would it not be a very good resolution to learn by heart portions of each of the four Advent psalms during the coming four weeks?

THURSDAY IN THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

The house of Israel is the vineyard of the Lord

1. **Scripture Reading.** Again today we hear glad Advent tidings. A heart-warming passage comes from the fourth and fifth chapters of the Book of Isaias. The first is a messianic prophecy (Is. 4:2–6):

In that day the branch of the Lord will be honorable and glorious,
and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of Israel's saved.
This will come to pass: Everything remaining in Sion,
everything in Jerusalem will be called holy,
every one destined to live in Jerusalem.
After the Lord has washed away the filth of the daughters of Sion
and has done away with the blood-guilt of Jerusalem
by windstorm and flame in judgment,
then he himself will come. Everywhere on Mount Sion will he be present,
and in all gatherings, as a cloud by day and as a flaming fire by night.
He will be a protecting roof against the heat,
security and shelter from storm and from rain.

This passage refers to the salvation of Sion after her purification. Its "good news" has been fulfilled in the outpouring of grace. As God once was present among the Jews in the wilderness in the cloud by day and in the pillar of fire by night, so now Christ is present in His Church "all days until the end of the world."

Grace makes us holy in the true sense of the word. Through grace we are "destined to live in the heavenly Jerusalem"; through grace we are cleansed from the filth of sin; and through grace the Triune God Himself comes into our souls to be our protection and shelter from temptation and evil. Joyous news indeed!

The second passage is a touching "lover's complaint," God reproaching Israel, His unfruitful vineyard (Is. 5:1–7):

I will sing a song about my friend and his vineyard.
My friend had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill.
He dug it, he cleared it of stones and planted it with vines.
In its midst he built a tower, and hollowed out a wine-press.
From it he expected a yield of grapes,
but it produced wild grapes.
And now, citizens of Jerusalem, men of Judah,
judge between me and my vineyard.
What more could I have done that I did not do to my vineyard?
I expected a yield of grapes,
but it produced wild grapes.
Now, let me tell you what I will do to my vineyard.
I will remove its hedge that it may become a pasture;
I will tear down its walls that people may trample over it;
I will destroy it; it shall not be hoed or pruned,
and thornbushes shall grow there;
the clouds, I will forbid them to water it with rain!
For the vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel,
Judah, His darling plant.
And He expected goodness — but see, wickedness;
innocence — but see, violence.

Here we have another strong contrast to the kingdom of God, to grace. The allegory is a serious exhortation to repent. Our souls were nourished by God's grace and were cultivated into a fruitful vineyard by our "Friend" Christ, but they became unfruitful through sin and infidelity. (Compare this passage with the parable of the unfruitful fig tree for which the vinedresser interceded in Luke 13:6–9.) How significant if we apply the last verses to ourselves. You are the vineyard of the Lord, you are His "darling plant," a soul in grace. Christ looks for goodness, and finds — wickedness; He expects innocence, and finds — violence.

2. The Responsories. The first responsory is devoted to Mary:

Receive, O Virgin Mary, receive the word of the Lord,
brought to you by His angel:
You will conceive and bring forth
God as well as Man.
You will be called: Blessed among all women.
You will bear a son, but remain a virgin undefiled.
You will conceive, and be a Mother still unspotted.

The second envisions the approaching King:

It was a vision by night. I looked and saw:
On the clouds of heaven the Son of Man was coming.
To Him were given a kingdom and honor;
all peoples, nations, and tongues were serving Him.
His power is everlasting, it shall never be taken from Him,
nor shall His kingdom ever be destroyed.

Upon awakening there nestles in our heart, like a drop of morning dew, the tender thought of the Virgin and Child: "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb" (*Ben. Ant.*). And as the day draws to its close, a longing for the Lord's coming grips us: "I am expecting the Lord my Savior, and will bid Him welcome when He approaches, alleluia" (*Magn. Ant.*).

Is there any unifying topic in today's texts on which we could base a meditation? Perhaps the words of Simeon would do: He is destined for the fall and for the rise of many. Our Savior, the Virgin's Son, brings the kingdom of God (grace); to the just it is a sheltering and guiding cloud, but to the wicked, a wasted vineyard. I am God's cherished planting, and He looks for "goodness and innocence" in me.

3. Adveniat regnum tuum. In our introduction to the season we suggested making the kingdom of God (grace) the object of our Advent efforts instead of the Lord directly. Accordingly we should say that grace is coming rather than that the Lord is coming. Such an approach would make Advent a time of longing

for the *kingdom of God,* a time of preparing our hearts for *grace.* Recall how John the Baptist prepared the Jews for their Redeemer by challenging them: "Change your way of thinking, for the kingdom of God is at hand!" Our Lord, too, began His preaching in Galilee with: the time is ripe, God's kingdom is imminent; change your way of thinking and believe the good tidings. How fitting, then, that Christ should embody into the Our Father the petition, Thy kingdom come, i.e., may Thy grace be given and received ever more widely. This petition can never be exhausted as long as we live. It will remain the Advent prayer of the Church and of Christians until the end of time. The very name and import of Advent flow from the words. Advent, therefore, is essentially a sincere prayer or desire for the extension of God's kingdom.

But what do we mean by the "kingdom of God"? If we say "the Church," there is danger of understanding it merely in an external way. Rather, say that it is grace, Christ's Mystical Body. That the Mystical Body may increase is the object of our desire, our longing, and our preparation. By what means is this to be accomplished? Let us recall the two parables of the mustard seed and the leaven. The Body of Christ must grow, it must absorb new members, just as the mustard seed must become the giant tree whose branches cover the earth. That is one aspect of the coming of God's kingdom — its external growth. Advent must remind the Church of her great mission to bring the kingdom of God to the souls of men. Primarily that is the duty of priests and spiritual directors — to preach the faith and to convert souls to grace. But Advent should arouse a zeal for souls not only in priests but also in all Christians. Lay people, too, have the mission of bringing God's kingdom to the family, to neighbors, relatives, and colleagues by word, example, and prayer.

God's kingdom must grow in depth, too. Here the parable of the leaven helps. The leaven penetrates the entire mass of dough. Grace must leaven and penetrate the depths of our souls. In other words, he who is holy should become more holy; he who is pure should become purer; he who is pious should be-

come a saint. Grace is infinite. We can never say that we already have enough. Our own souls, then, are our workshop during Advent; the blueprint for our efforts is the Advent prayer, "Thy kingdom come."

Thy kingdom come: How does the life of grace fare in my soul? My share in the kingdom of God depends upon the amount of grace I have. For grace makes my soul truly holy, as God Himself is holy.

Thy kingdom come: How is my faith, my trust in God, my self-surrender to God?

Thy kingdom come: How is my hope, which is to be placed in Christ alone? Do I harbor a worldly idol as a co-regent in my heart?

Thy kingdom come: Do I love God above everything else?

Thy kingdom come: How is my observance of the commandments, which God requires before He dispenses His grace?

Thy kingdom come: How is my prayer life? The incense of my prayers should rise daily from the temple of my soul.

Thy kingdom come: In what state are the virtues which I am supposed to exercize?

Only through such soul-searching does the kingdom of God flourish within us, only through such effort do we contribute to a bettering of the Advent season in the Chnrch at large. Christ cannot manifest Himself except through grace. In the past He came "in the flesh," in the future He will return "with great power and glory," but now in the present He appears through the medium of the kingdom of God, through the medium of His grace. Here lies our sublimest Advent task. *Adveniat regnum tuum*!

FRIDAY IN THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

Here I am; send me!

1. Scripture Reading. The prophet Isaias sketches a magnificent scene for us today as he recounts his inaugural vision (Is. 6:1–13).

> In the year that King Ozias died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lofty, and his train filled the temple. Seraphim were hovering over him, each having six wings. With two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to the other:
>
> Holy, holy, holy
> is the Lord God of hosts.
> His glory fills the whole earth.
>
> At their loud crying the threshold foundations shook, and the house was filled with smoke. Then I said:
>
> Woe to me! I am lost.
> For with unclean lips I live among an
> unclean people,
> and my eyes have seen the Lord of hosts!
>
> Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a glowing coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar, and he touched my mouth and said:
>
> This has touched your lips;
> your guilt has vanished,
> and your sins have been blotted out.
>
> Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying: 'Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?' And I said: 'Here I am; send me!' And he said: 'Then go, and tell this people: Keep on hearing and hearing without understanding; seeing and seeing without comprehending. Make gross the heart of this people, their ears dull;

> and blind their eyes, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their heart — and be converted and healed.' Then I said: 'How long, O Lord?' And he said: 'Until their cities are destroyed, emptied of inhabitants; and their houses empty of men; and the land left to waste. For the Lord shall remove men far away, and the land shall become a grand desert. Nevertheless, as a stump remains when the oak is felled, so shall this stump become a holy sprout.'

Such the vision and its message. Here for the first time we hear the song of the seraphim, "Holy, holy, holy," the trisagion which since the earliest times has been used in the liturgy at the beginning of the Canon. The cleansing with the glowing coal likewise has liturgical application; daily before proclaiming the Gospel the priest prays: "Cleanse my heart and my lips as once You cleansed the lips of the prophet Isaias with a burning coal . . . ." God's curse against the stubborn nation is easily recalled from the Sunday Gospel in which Christ Himself appeals to it (Mt. 13:14). The passage points up Israel's epic tragedy: a divinely chosen people on the way to rejection. Even to the present time the sad oracle continues to be fulfilled as the Jewish people "blind their eyes" (*obcaecatio* — see Bidding Prayers on Good Friday) to the work of God. Yet the prophecy gives no grounds for despair. Its closing lines tell of the "holy sprout," our Advent hope, the Redeemer.

In Holy Scripture we find recorded how a number of prophets received their divine mission, usually in a vision, e.g., Moses, Samuel, Jeremias, Ezechiel. In our lives, too, there comes a call, not with a vision, of course, but surely with all the needed grace. The decisive first call was that to baptism; then followed the vocation to some specific work in life (marriage, priesthood, religious life, virginity). We must be absolutely convinced that God's hand reaches down into our lives in a very strong and positive manner, even though we sense nothing extraordinary. It is part of Advent spirituality to become sensitive and responsive to God's call from on high.

2. Two Advent Responsories voicing our desire for the Redeemer:

We are looking for our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.
He will take our poor bodies and make them like His glorified Body.
Therefore we must live soberly, virtuously, and godly in this world,
awaiting with peaceful hope the glorious appearance of our great God.

The next responsory reflects the ardent sentiments of the early Christians for Christ's return:

O Lord, I pray You, please do send Him
whom You are sending.
See the predicament of Your people!
Come and deliver us, as You have promised.
O Shepherd of Israel, listen,
You who lead Joseph like a flock,
You who sit enthroned above the cherubim.

"Behold, He who is both God and Man shall come from the house of David and sit upon the throne, alleluia" *(Ben. Ant.)*. At dawn Mother Church points her finger to the rising sun and says: See, even as the sun rises, so shall the Lord come. "Out of Egypt have I called my Son. He shall come to save His people" *(Magn. Ant.)*.

There are two main points about which our meditation today may revolve, our Redeemer and our calling. Our Redeemer comes to our rescue now and He will come to our rescue on the Last Day. Only those who are called and who obey their calling are rescued by Him. We who have been called have the duty of aiding the rescue of others.

3. Longing. Of the prophets, Isaias is our chief guide during Advent. His message is that of heartfelt longing for the Savior. Daily he has us sing: "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down the Just One. Let the earth be opened and bud forth the Savior."

What does it mean to "long" for redemption? Let us first look at nature. Before the soil receives the seed, it must be readied by plowing and harrowing. Such "readying" may be regarded as "longing" by the soil. When the summer sun beats down upon field and meadow and the weeks go by without a drop of rain, the ground thirsts for water — it longs. Before we take food, we first feel hunger. Hunger is the organism's way of longing. In nature, therefore, there is a kind of longing which is a preparation and prerequisite for growth and fruitfulness.

Or consider human nature. Desire is a basic passion of the human heart. Is there any man who does not cherish them by multitudes? The child builds himself dream castles. The adult thirsts for success. The heart of man is a bottomless abyss always yawning hungrily. "The leech has two daughters; their names: More, More" (Prov. 30:15). What lust men have for money! To what gross, barbaric extremes do sensuality and concupiscence drive them! How insatiable their yen for earthly doohickies and thingamajigs, a driving hunger pressing for appeasement.

Nature is a divinely ordained pattern for supernature. Should not these powerful forces within man also be placed in the service of God? Man can indeed hunger for the Divine, a hunger God utilized in preparing mankind for the Messiah. The need for a Redeemer had to be aroused in both Gentile and Jew. For the Jews this was achieved by the prophets, for the Gentiles through reason showing how completely chaotic were their spiritual and moral lives. So throughout antiquity rang the cry: "Rain down, O heavens, the Just One!"

Nor did human longing cease with the appearance of the Messiah. You know the memorable words of St. Augustine: "Our hearts are restless until they rest in Thee." Owning all the trinkets in a department store cannot quench the thirst of your human heart. God can.

But since we already possess the Redeemer, how can our longing for Him, you say, be anything but a mere glow of sentiment with no real value? Answer the problem in terms of longing

for redemption, longing for God's kingdom, longing for sanctifying grace. The Our Father contains such an Advent petition: "Thy kingdom come." Its meaning? That the soul be *won* for God, that it *be* the kingdom of God, that it become a vessel wholly filled with grace. Is your heart such? Is there no follicle where the world, the ego, the devil still tarries? Is your spiritual battery completely grace-charged?

Christ must rule in all the departments of the soul. Our understanding should thirst after the knowledge of God, that we may know the depth and the height and the breadth of Christian life. The will should be filled with divine power and grace to accomplish what God demands. Oh how weak we really are! Our heart, so often tepid, ought beat warmly for its Spouse, Christ Jesus. Our talent, skill, ability should be husbanded in the service of Catholic Action and Christian virtue. In other words, Advent desire includes intense awareness of our spiritual needs and duties.

We can express this longing in other ways, too. We may wish to help the pagans, at home or abroad. We may pray for those who do not share our longing for the Redeemer. Ardently, devoutly we may keep on our lips the ejaculation: *Adveniat regnum tuum,* "Thy kingdom come!" Excellent plowing for the seed of a heavenly harvest!

SATURDAY IN THE FIRST WEEK OF ADVENT

A virgin will conceive

1. Scripture Reading. Today's reading (a portion of which serves as the second Lesson in the Rorate Mass) contains the prophecy of the Messiah's birth of a Virgin. Isaias had been sent to the godless Achaz (ca. 735 B.C.) with the message that the king should demand a miracle from heaven in assurance of divine help against Judah's enemies. Insolently Achaz rejected the prophet's proposal. The king's arrogance called for punishment; now the sign would spell judgment upon Jerusalem and the dynasty of Achaz, evils that would befall the land before the Virgin would give birth to Emmanuel:

> Again Isaias spoke to Achaz: 'Ask for yourself a sign from Yahweh, your God, either from the depths of Sheol below or in the heights of heaven above.' But Achaz replied: 'I ask for nothing; I will not tempt Yahweh.'
>
> Then he said: 'Listen now, you of the house of David. Aren't you satisfied by being noisome to men that you become noisome to my God also? The Lord himself will give you a sign indeed! See, the virgin conceives and bears a Son; she names him Emmanuel and he lives on curd and wild honey [1] when (old enough) to refuse the bad and take the good. For before the boy can refuse the bad and take the good that land will be a desolate waste which now trembles because of those two kings. For the Lord will bring upon you and your people and your father's house days the like of which have not been seen. . . .

It is a most appropriate passage for Advent. For the first time in prophecy do we meet the lovely picture of Virgin and Child.

[1] The fare of the poor; for the Messiah, though of the royal line of David, will not eat from the royal table because the dynasty had perished due to Achaz' sin and insolence.

The Child's name merits our special attention, Emmanuel, i.e., God with us. In the light of fulfillment we see how this name reveals most sublime truths about our Savior — that He not only assumed our nature through the incarnation but that He raises men to a divine dignity through grace, making them sharers of God's own Nature by living in their souls.

2. **The Responsories** speak enthusiastically of Emmanuel.

Hear the word of the Lord, ye nations,
and declare it to the ends of the earth.
Say to the isles far off: our Savior is coming!
Declare it, make it known, lift your voice and shout aloud.
Say to the isles far off: our Savior is coming!

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord,
when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch.
He will rule as King, He will be wise;
He will execute judgment and justice upon the earth.
And this is the Name that people will call Him:
the Lord our Just One.
In those days Judah will be saved,
and Israel will dwell peacefully.

Early in the morning the Church reflects consolingly: "Fear not, Sion, your God is coming, alleluia" (*Ben. Ant.*).

3. **The Messianic Prophecies.** Today's reading offers occasion for considering in order the great messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. This will give us a glimpse at the pedagogy by which God sought to reveal the Messiah ever more clearly to men. We start with the protoevangel (Gen. 3:15): "I will put enmities between you and the woman, between your seed and her seed. He will crush your head, while you will only wound his heel." The future Conqueror of Satan will be a descendant of Eve.

Next the prophecy of Noe (Gen. 9:18–29). Sem will be the bearer of the messianic promise, while Japhet will share in its blessings. Christ will be of Jewish origin; the Gentiles will not

be excluded from His kingdom. The third prophecy was that given to Abraham (Gen. 22:1–19): "In your seed all the peoples of the earth will be blessed."

From a later date we may note the prophetical blessing given by Jacob on his deathbed (Gen. 49:10). It stated that the Messiah will come from the tribe of Judah, and He will save the Gentiles too.

In Moses we have one of the great Old Testament personages prefiguring the Messiah. As deliverer, leader, provider, and teacher of his people he typified Christ, who fulfills these functions par excellence for us Christians. Next in line is David — ancestor, prophet, and type of Christ. More lines in the messianic picture.

It would be a wonderful project to extract the various messianic passages from the psalms and arrange them topically. According to the express words of Jesus, the psalms abound with prophecies and references to the Messiah (Lk. 24:44). Of particular importance are Psalms 2, 15, 18, 21, 39, 44, 68, 71, 88, 109, 131.

The various prophetical books, of course, hold a unique position. Here Isaias ranks highest, the evangelist among the prophets. However, Jeremias, Daniel, Joel, Jonas, Micheas, Zacharias, and others have contributed substantially to the development of Old Testament messianism.

THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT
THE BRIDE PREPARES HERSELF

Like the sun the Lord shall rise upon thee, O Jerusalem, and His glory shall be seen upon thee

1. Saturday Evening. With first Vespers we begin the liturgy for the second Sunday of Advent. Again the antiphons are redolent with Advent hope: "Behold, the Lord is coming upon the clouds of heaven with great power, alleluia." We make our way to the city of Jerusalem, of which much will be heard tomorrow: "Sion, you are our strong city; instead of walls and bulwarks you have the Savior! Open wide the gates, for God is with us, alleluia." And now the Church speaks consolingly: "Behold, the Lord will appear; He does not lie. If He lingers, wait for Him, because He will surely come — He will not tarry, alleluia." At the Savior's advent all creation will praise God: "The mountains and the hills will sing a song of praise before God; all the trees of the woods will clap their hands, for the Lord the Ruler is coming and He will reign forever, alleluia, alleluia." At Christ's coming His servants too will be enlightened: "Behold, our Lord will come with power and He will enlighten the eyes of His servants, alleluia." With longing hearts we sing the Magnificat antiphon: "Come, Lord, visit us in peace that we may rejoice in You with all our heart."

A prelude to Sunday, tonight's Vespers ring jubilantly throughout. A comparison of these antiphons with last Sunday's shows an intensification of Advent longing. The season's second Sunday is devoted to the bride's preparation for her Spouse. The chapter reading introduces a new point, the use of Holy Scripture. During the following week we should gladly use every opportunity that brings the Bible nearer to us. God "comes" to us in Holy Scripture too.

2. The Church. The Lord is coming to His city, Jerusalem! Jerusalem, the city and likewise the bride of the great King, adorns herself for a splendid reception. These are the glad tidings

of Advent's second week, a further step in the development of the overall message.

What does this "city" signify? Our Savior once told a rather cryptic parable. A man found a great treasure in a field he had rented. Quickly he went and gathered together all his belongings in order to buy the field and thus made secure his retention of the field. Jesus also related another quite similar parable. A merchant found out about a large pearl of extraordinary value. Immediately he sold his property and all his belongings so that he could acquire the precious pearl for himself. I should like to compare these parables to a coconut. The coconut has a thick, hard shell which is fibrous and rough. But it shelters sweet meat and milk, and preserves them well for a long time. Now only he who knows how to "crack" the shell finds the treasure inside.

We resemble the man with the field and the merchant. We are in possesion of a great treasure; that we modestly admit. It is like a huge chest filled with legal currency and precious stones. In particular, what does it contain? First of all, grace, the glittering crown of the entire treasure. The other valuables serve only to enhance sanctifying grace — holy Mass, the Church year, the Bible, Christ, the Church, in brief, our living in union with the Church. Such is the treasure we have uncovered. Let not some critic say to you: "That has been true for a long time." No, it has not. It was overlooked, forgotten. Anyone who speaks in this way has not yet discovered the treasure. But we have found the treasure. Therefore, we should rejoice, for it affords solid reason for Advent joy.

The liturgy shows special honor today to the Church, our Mother. Fresh from our discovery, let us go to her and say: "Mother, only now have we again come to know you! You are the kingdom of God to us! You are the Body of Christ! You are the donor of our greatest possession, the divine life of grace! You are, therefore, more than our earthly mother — you are the Mother of God's Life within us. Our return gift to you today is our desire to live most intimately with you!"

THE SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Station at Holy Cross in Jerusalem

Last Sunday's message was one exhorting us to penance. From the distance came thunder peals, the Lord returning in judgment. Today, however, it is a joyous message throughout, one that may be epitomized in the phrase: the kingdom of God is coming. We already know what the words mean — the continued expansion of the Church, Christ's bride; which for individuals manifests itself in an increase of divine life or grace. With the Savior's advent, God's kingdom will be ushered in. Today's liturgy endeavors to increase our esteem and admiration for this inestimable treasure; the whole Sunday could well be regarded as a feast dedicated to it. First the liturgy presents Jerusalem as a type of the messianic kingdom. In response to the glad tidings man is required to prepare the way.

1. **Jerusalem.** In Palestine Christians gather today in Jerusalem for the celebration of holy Mass. In Rome they proceed to the stational church "Holy Cross at Jerusalem" which serves to give the atmosphere of the Holy City.

Why "Jerusalem"? Excavations of ancient sites often reveal a number of strata. When enemies destroyed a city, a new one would rise on the same location, so that today there are several layers of remains, one city, as it were, above the other. Our Jerusalem likewise has four strata. The bottommost layer is the Jerusalem of the Jews, that venerable land where the Lord Jesus began His mission of redemption, where He suffered and died.

This is the historical Jerusalem so dear to us Christians. Anyone making a pilgrimage to the Holy Land enters that ancient city with holy awe. That Jerusalem, however, lies buried deep.

For us another has been built upon it, the Jerusalem of Christians, God's kingdom on earth, the holy Church. This city still stands; it is the one which the divine King will enter at Christmas. Now we understand why we will hear so much about Jerusalem during the coming week. We should now clean and adorn our city, improving its streets and avenues through which the Savior will make His entrance. As a motto we should take the words of the precursor, St. John the Baptist: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths; let every valley be filled, every hill be leveled." Holy Mother Church's message today is that the Savior is coming to the Jerusalem of the Christians, to the Church.

Above the second stratum there arises a third, the heavenly Jerusalem at the end of time. Already now the Church sings of this Jerusalem. For during Advent we await the Savior who will appear on the Last Day to take all into "the new Jerusalem coming down from heaven."

Finally, there may be recognized a fourth Jerusalem, our souls in sanctifying grace. This city too must be adorned and prepared, for the King will want to enter. That is our present task.

On Epiphany, the climax to the current season, the Church will cry out: "Arise, shine, O Jerusalem, for the glory of the Lord has risen upon thee." That is the goal. Today we must prepare for the great King's visit to our city. The whole coming week must be devoted to it. The Church prays: "Awaken our hearts to prepare the way for Your only-begotten Son that we may serve Him with purified hearts."

In the time of the Roman Empire, rulers rode from city to city for the purpose of official visitations. Their appearance, called *epiphany* or *parousia*, was a great event, one preceded by months of preparation. Something analogous takes place in the Jerusalem of our souls. From a high watchtower we see the Lord coming afar off. Suddenly John the Baptist appears; he hurries

into the city to announce the King's approach. God condescends to manifest Himself to us in grace; but He demands the proper reception.

There are numerous references to Jerusalem in the hours of the Divine Office.

Behold, the Lord shall come,
and all His saints with Him.
In that day a great light shall arise,
and they shall go out from Jerusalem like clean water.
And the Lord shall rule over all peoples forever.
Behold, the Lord is coming in power,
exercizing might and authority,
having His kingdom well in hand.

The chants of the Mass treat exclusively of Jerusalem: "People of Sion, behold, the Lord will come to save the nations! He will make His glorious voice resound to gladden your heart" (Intr.). "The splendor of His glory streams forth from Sion; God comes in visible form. Gather together His saints unto Him, they who have made a covenant of sacrifice with Him" (Grad.). "Jerusalem, arise and climb the watchtower. Behold the peace that comes to you from your God" (Comm.). "Sion, you are our strong city; instead of walls and bulwarks you have the Savior. Open wide the gates, for God is with us, alleluia." These are only some of the figures with which today's liturgy depicts the kingdom of God.

2. The New Paradise. The prophet Isaias describes the messianic kingdom as one of peace, a new paradise (Is. 11:1–10).

A branch will come forth from the stump of Jesse,
from his roots a sprig will sprout.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him —
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of fortitude,
the Spirit of knowledge and of godliness,
and He will be filled with the Spirit of the fear of
the Lord.

He will not judge according to appearances,
or give decisions upon hearsay.
He will render just judgments in favor of the poor,
with equity he will decide cases for the downtrodden
in the land.
He will smite sinners with the rod of his mouth,
and slay the godless with the breath of his lips.
Righteousness will be the sash about his loins,
and truth the girdle round his reins.

The prophet here sees a fresh, new sprout growing out from an apparently dead tree trunk. Its meaning? The stump is King David, the son of Isais (Jesse). David's descendant, Mary, gives birth to the Messiah, the new branch in the Davidic line. The prophet, furthermore, sees the Messiah filled with the gifts of the Spirit of God. Here for the first time we find mention of the seven gifts, which we too receive at confirmation. Before the prophet's eyes the Redeemer quickly grows from a little shoot to a mighty King, acting as the Father and Defender of the poor and as the stern Judge of evildoers. Then he describes the messianic kingdom, our holy Church:

The wolf will lodge with the lamb,
the leopard lie down with the kid.
The calf and the young lion will browse together,
with a little child shepherding them.
Cow and bear will graze in common,
and their young too will lie down together.
The lion will eat straw like the ox,
while the suckling child plays on the hole of the asp,
while the weaned child puts his hand into the adder's
den.
Jesse's root in that day will become a people's emblem.
About him the Gentiles will inquire,
and glory will surround his dwelling place.

Here we have another beautiful prophecy. To bring home the spiritual peace in paradise, popular catechetics had made

all the animals tame. Why not use the same approach in presenting the new paradise of the kingdom of God? Outwardly, of course, the earth will remain a scene of strife. The new paradise will be the souls of God's children. The prophet is speaking of the peace of Christ "which the world cannot give," the peace "which surpasses all understanding," the peace of which the angels sang over the fields of Bethlehem at the Savior's birth. Isaias, therefore, is extolling the glories of divine grace, for grace makes the soul a paradise, a kingdom of peace, a vessel for the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit. The soul with sanctifying grace is the fulfillment of all prophecies.

3. Harmony and Love. St. Paul also proclaims to us the good tidings of the kingdom of God. In the Introit of the Mass the Church sings: "People of Sion, behold, the Lord will come to save the nations." Such, too, is the message of the Apostle of the Gentiles. In the Epistle he points out how Christ came to save both Jews and Gentiles. Because of God's faithfulness our Savior grew up among the Jews "in order to fulfill the promises made to your fathers." The Gentiles, however, to whom no promises were made, "praise God for His mercy." At this point Paul lingers to introduce a list of passages which show how God through Christ proved His mercy to the Gentiles. To us of non-Jewish descent these words are most consoling. Highly ought we treasure the good fortune of our call unto grace. To all, all alike, St. Paul preaches harmony and love, for in the new Jerusalem all become one people of God.

4. The Savior. Today's program began with the Church speaking of Jerusalem; there followed the prophet's description of the future kingdom of God, and St. Paul's teachings on the reconciliation of nations. Now in the Gospel Christ Himself speaks. His theme, too, is that of the kingdom. "Go, tell John what you have heard and observed: the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead arise, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not scandalized in Me." Do not misunderstand these words. In God's kingdom of grace such wonders are happening daily, hourly. Yes,

our Lord is the divine Physician who heals those who are blind to heavenly realities; who makes the lame walk into life everlasting; who cleanses the leprosy of sin; who makes the dead arise. With these few words Jesus well describes His kingdom of grace. In today's Gospel He also presents His faithful forerunner as the model for Advent hope, the model for all who seek God and who are willing to clear the way for His entrance.

5. Holy Mass (Populus Sion). Although we already treated the main themes of the Divine Office and the Mass, it would be advantageous to point up the main thought trends in the Mass formulary.

The *Introit* is the cry of a herald: People of God (viz., we Christians), behold, the Lord will come to bring salvation to the nations; He will make His glorious voice resound to gladden your hearts. A joyful proclamation, indeed, of the Redeemer's coming! In this Introit can be detected a splendid indication of all the marvels proper to the approaching era of which Christmas is only a beginning. The Lord lets His voice resound from the crib, from the cross, from the tomb, through the Holy Spirit, and through the trumpets of the Last Day. Indeed, every Sunday He makes His glorious voice gladden our hearts through His message at Mass. Psalm 79, used as the Introit psalm, is quite reserved; yet in its refrain there is the ring of longing and desire for the restoration of God's dominion over man.

The *Collect* is perhaps our most beautiful Advent prayer; we ask God to arouse our sleeping hearts that we may prepare the way for His Son. Here for the first time we hear the important admonition to *prepare the way*, a counsel that will frequently be repeated. The *Epistle* begins with a seemingly untimely reference to the value of Holy Scripture and then passes over into an exhortation to harmonious living among Christians. The Apostle bases this plea for harmony upon the fact that God called both Jew and Gentile to the faith; the Jews by reason of the promise and the Gentiles by virtue of His mercy. Then the Apostle elaborates on the calling of the Gentiles and concludes with an Advent prayer: "May the God of hope fill you with joy and

peace in the faith, that you may abound with hope and the power of the Holy Spirit" — a wonderful prayer which summarizes the glories of Christianity, and another instance of our Redeemer's "glorious voice." The stream of grace destined to flood in upon us at Christmas will bring us these glories of the kingdom of God.

The *Gradual* gives a wonderful picture of the holy Sacrifice. We behold the Savior coming to Sion in majesty and unite ourselves with the saints in the oblation, while He offers Himself. We behold the radiant countenance of Christ; around Him are gathered the saints (the *ecclesia*) covenant-bound to the Eucharistic Sacrifice. With joy we "go into the house of the Lord," the new Jerusalem (*All.*). In the *Gospel* we hear the questions and answers of the imprisoned Baptist. According to liturgical usage, Christ is here proclaiming to us His spiritual activity in the kingdom of God. He is the "Savior" who seeks to heal the lame, the deaf, the blind; He intends to raise up the dead; He wants to bring the good news of salvation to the poor. Only be on guard not to take offence at His unpretentious ways. Then He Himself introduces the Baptist to us as the herald who will ready the way. The *Offertory* and *Secret* petition the Lord to turn, to show us the joy of salvation, and to forgive us by reason of the holy Sacrifice. The Mass and the Eucharist are the pledge and the "pre-fulfillment" of the glorious coming of God's kingdom, and thus in the *Communion* we behold the future glory of the Lord. Should our desire be anything but "to treasure earthly things lightly while loving those of heaven"? (*Postc.*). The entire formulary has a very joyous mood, particularly in the various chants; for with happy heart the bride is preparing herself to receive her Spouse, Christ Jesus.

At Vespers the Church sings: "Are You He who is to come or must we look for another? Tell John the things you have observed: the blind see, the dead arise, the poor have the gospel preached to them, alleluia." We notice in the Gospel that the Church gives prominence to three works of Christ, works which have symbolical meaning in the kingdom of God: enlighten-

ment (through baptism), resurrection (from sin), and joyous tidings (the Gospel message).

MONDAY IN THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

The Savior, boon or bane?

1. **Scripture Reading.** In stark contrast to yesterday's bright picture of Jerusalem, the prophet sketches Babylon's doom (Is. 13).

Behold, the day of the Lord is coming,
cruel and full of wrath and fierce anger.
He will lay waste the land and crush to pieces the sinners upon it.
No longer will the stars give their light,
the sun will be darkened at rising and the moon will cease to shine.
For I am punishing the world for its wickedness,
and evildoers for their sins;
I will check the pride of the insolent,
and humble the arrogance of tyrants . . . .
Therefore the heavens will tremble,
and the earth will shake out of its place
at the wrath of the Lord of hosts,
on the day when his fierce anger will glow.
Like a frightened doe, like lambs without a shepherd,
each one will turn to his people and flee into his homeland.
Whoever is captured will be slain,
whoever is seized will fall by the sword . . . .
And Babylon, the kingdom's crown, the proud splendor of the Chaldeans,
will be destroyed, as the Lord once did to Sodom and Gomorrha.

The words of the prophet have long been fulfilled. Babylon lies in ruins, a symbol of the downfall of earthly greatness. The Savior's coming at Christmas will be a boon to the good (Jerusalem) but a bane to the wicked (Babylon).

2. Responsories. Again the theme of the responsories is Jerusalem:

No longer shall the unclean walk about Jerusalem;
for in that day the mountains shall drip sweetness;
and the hills flow with milk and honey, says the Lord.
God shall come from Lebanon,
the Holy One from the dark and shady mountain.

As a mother comforts her children,
so will I comfort you, says the Lord.
My help will come to you from Jerusalem,
the city I have chosen.
When you see this, your heart will rejoice;
I will bestow salvation upon Sion,
and My glory upon Jerusalem.

These responsories describe the glories and the consolations of divine grace.

The antiphons at dawn and dusk refer to the coming King. "The Lord and Ruler comes from heaven; in His hand are honor and dominion" (*Ben. Ant.*). "Behold, the King is coming, the Lord of all the earth! He Himself will strike off from us our yoke of bondage" (*Magn. Ant.*). What beautiful symbolism! In the rising sun the liturgy sees our King. And according to Advent thinking, we are still under Satan's yoke of bondage.

The chief consideration of today's liturgy is: Christ appears as Babylon's bane, but as Jerusalem's boon. It is an appearance that can be oriented either to the past or to the future. But more important is His current appearance in our souls through grace. For your soul at the same time is Jerusalem and Babylon. May the Redeemer bring grace to it as Jerusalem and ruin to what it has of Babylon.

3. Psalm 79. Of all the psalms, none is more intimately associated with Advent than Psalm 79. At the very outset note how it embodies in five variations the best known Advent prayer: "Stir up Your might and come . . . *Excita potentiam tuam et veni.*" Psalm 79, one of the finest elegies in the Bible, has as its principal theme the parable of the ruined vine. Israel, once God's fruitful vine, now lies desolate (Babylonian exile), given over to the caprice of her enemies. In four striking refrains the psalmist begs Yahweh to restore her to her former glory.

Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,
O Leader of the flock of Joseph.
You who are enthroned above the cherubim
show yourself a helper to Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasses.
Stir up your might
and come to save us.
O God, bring us back again;
show us your countenance and we will be saved!

O Lord God of hosts,
how long will you be angry against the prayer of your servant?
How long will you feed us the bread of tears
and give us tears to drink from huge beakers?
You have made us a cause of strife among our neighbors,
and our enemies scoff at us.
O God of hosts, bring us back again;
show us your countenance and we will be saved!

You brought a vine from Egypt;
you drove out the heathen and planted it.
You prepared the ground for it;
you planted its root deep, so it could fill the land.
Its shadow covered the very hills,
and its branches the mighty cedars.

It sent out its branches to the sea,
and its thick foliage as far as the Great River.
Why have you broken down its hedge,
so that all who pass by pluck its fruit?
The wild boar from the forest roots it up,
the wild beast of the field devours it.
O God of hosts, bring us back again!

Look down from heaven and see,
and care for this vine;
restore what your right hand has planted.
It is burnt with fire and cut down!
Destroy them with a wrathful glance.
Extend your hand over your protégés,
over the son whom you reared for yourself.
Never again will we then abandon you;
quicken us, and we will call upon your name.
O Lord God of hosts, bring us back again:
show us your countenance and we will be saved!

Liturgical Application. Is it possible for the Christian to pray this psalm, dealing entirely, as it does, with the history of the Jewish people? Certainly. Such psalms with an historical background are parables. All that is needed is to find the point of comparison. Once this is determined, the parable is easily understood. The details, which defy comparison, serve merely to enhance the picture. What is the point of comparison in Psalm 79? The exile and return of the Jews is a symbol of mankind, unredeemed and redeemed. If one wishes to allegorize, the vine would stand for the Church (or for the soul) wasted through sin and restored through Christ. As long as we live on this earth, we are living in exile. Our final return to the heavenly Jerusalem will occur at Christ's Second Coming. Now we understand the liturgical use of this psalm in Advent. Applied to the soul it is a lament over the loss of grace and an Advent prayer for spiritual restoration. In it the season's two great motifs find powerful ex-

pression — need for redemption and longing for Christ. For this reason it serves so admirably as the Church's Advent song par excellence.

Note the link between today's lessons and responsories and Psalm 79. Babylon and Jerusalem, the wasted and the restored vine, occasion the same spiritual reflections.

TUESDAY IN THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

In your own hands you hold life and death

1. Scripture Reading. The scene for today's Lessons is in the depths of Sheol; the prophet utters his celebrated taunt-song against Babylon's king (Is. 14:1–15).

When the Lord will give you rest
  from sorrow and vexation and from the hard bondage
    with which you were oppressed,
  then you will sing this taunt-song
    against the king of Babylon:
How still now the tyrant, how mute his tyranny!
For the Lord has broken the sceptre of that godless ruler
  who smote the nations in wrath with endless blows,
  who subjected the peoples in anger without mercy.
Now the whole earth rests and is still.
Rejoicing breaks out —
  even the cypresses and the cedars of Lebanon rejoice
    over your fate,
  they say:
  Since you have fallen, no one has come up to fell us!
Awaiting your coming, Sheol was astir;
  to greet you she roused up the shades, earth's erst-
    while princes!
The kings of the nations she bids rise from their thrones.
See, they all get up to say to you:

What, you too a feeble shade, and weak like one of us!
Your pride is brought down to hell, with the plucking of your harps.
For a bed you have maggots, for covering, worms.
How you have fallen from heaven, you Morning-star!
How you have been smitten to earth, you conqueror of nations!
You thought to yourself: I will scale the heavens,
I will set my throne above the stars of God;
I will reign on the Mount of Assembly in the farthest north;
I will ascend the heights of the clouds,
I will become like (God) the Most High.
But now you have been brought down to Sheol,
to the depths of the pit.

Disregarding the poetic character of the passage, patristic writers applied it to the fall of the angels at the beginning of creation. For this reason the leader of the fallen angels was called Lucifer, i.e., Morning-star. It is a composition that deeply impresses us once we lift it out of its narrow historical bounds. Clearly does it show how every conflict between the kingdom of God and the powers of evil must end.

2. The Responsories. With yearning hearts we plead for the coming of the Lord and His kingdom:

O mountains of Israel, spread out your branches,
blossom and bring forth fruit,
for the day of the Lord is coming fast.
Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above,
and let the skies rain the Just One;
let the earth open and bring forth the Savior.

Let the mountains drip sweetness and the hills
righteousness,

for the Lord, the Light of the world, is coming with power.
And Law will go forth from Sion,
the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

At the Benedictus antiphon today Mother Church points to the rising sun: "Upon you, O Jerusalem, the Lord will rise like the sun, and His glory will be visible upon you." Here we have the briefest summary of the whole week's liturgy. In the evening the precursor reminds us of our most important, immediate task: "A voice cries out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight the paths of our God" (*Magn. Ant.*).

It is remarkable how often the liturgy presents its message by means of striking contrasts. Today it is the kingdom of God versus the powers of evil. On the one side we see Lucifer, the proud leader of the fallen angels, who wishes "to exalt his throne above the stars of God." Opposite to him stands the humble Baptist, admonishing us to do penance. First we witness the headlong fall of heaven's Morning Star; then there rises the divine Sun over Jerusalem. How magnificently the responsories accent Advent's positive message in contrast to the lessons satirizing the haughty and the proud.

3. Preparing the Way. The first great objective which the Church proposes during Advent is holy longing; the second is spiritual preparation. Let us consider what this latter implies. Daily at Lauds the Church prays: "A voice cries out in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths." In last Sunday's Gospel we heard Jesus say: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A prophet? . . . it is he of whom it is written: I will send My messenger before Me who will prepare the way for Me." Christ Himself, therefore, told us that John's chief work consisted in *preparing the way* for the Redeemer. We will hear these words again in the Gospels of the season's remaining two Sundays.

Then, too, this week's Collect reads: "Stir up our hearts that we may prepare the way for Your only-begotten Son. . . ." These

passages should be sufficient evidence that "preparing the way" is an essential feature of Advent. What does the command imply? We already know that the coming of Christ is synonymous with the coming of grace into our souls. Christ's advent through grace means divine Life renewed and intensified. Twice each year this flow of divine Life should reach high tide — at Christmas and at Easter. In both instances, as in nature, an ebb precedes flood tide, viz., Advent and Lent. During these periods we have to work hard to ready ourselves for the incoming waves. What can we do? Believe and obey. Grace is the work of God; faith and obedience are man's contribution. The first requirement in "preparing the way" is faith (longing); the second is obedience (keeping the commandments). The answer, then, is easy: "preparing the way" means moral reformation and growth in virtue.

Once God required obedience to His will in paradise; it is no different now. The main message of John the Baptist was: do penance, for the kingdom of God is near. But what did he mean by penance? In Greek the word is *metanoia*, a change of mind. Our thoughts and desires must shift their centers from earthly to heavenly things, from the ego to God. Advent not only affords an opportunity to strengthen our conviction regarding the need for redemption, but it is also a time to re-evaluate our attitudes and interests. Each person must ask himself: "Where do I stand? What are my prime concerns? In my conduct are there valleys (omissions) and are there mountains and hills (transgressions)?" Well, indeed, did last Sunday's Collect summarize the purposes of Advent: *Stir up our hearts* — for we were asleep with regard to the work of our salvation; *that we may prepare the way for Your only-begotten Son* — through genuine reformation of life; *that at His coming* — at Christmas when divine Life will flood in upon our souls; *we may be worthy to serve Him with purified souls* — our hearts must go through a cleansing bath in Advent; the final aim of all our efforts is "to serve God." We will be ready for the Redeemer when we can say with Mary: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord."

WEDNESDAY IN THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Send forth the Lamb, the Ruler of the world

1. Scripture Reading. *Prefatory note.* Thus far we adhered to the selections given in the Roman Breviary in our comments on Sacred Scripture because these passages were among the finest in the prophet Isaias. From now on, however, we shall make our own selection because that of the Breviary is too mechanical, pays little attention to content, and finds no room for very important messianic prophecies. In early times the readings from Scripture at the hours of common prayer were not fixed; a given book would be read continuously, with stops being made at the bidding of the superior. When the Breviary (i.e., the shortened form of the Divine Office) was edited in the Middle Ages, Scripture readings were retained but the selection and abridgment proceeded in an entirely mechanical manner. The choosing of readings intelligently and with liturgical pertinence remains for a future Breviary reform; then those who pray the Office will every year find fresh inspiration and joy from the pages of Holy Scripture. To make one's own choice, then, of prophetic passages is not contrary to the spirit of the liturgy.

Today's Matins contains a prophecy against the Moabites quite meagre in content (Is. 16:1–8). Perhaps the passage was retained because its first verse is messianically slanted in the Latin Vulgate; in the original, however, there is no reference to the Messiah. It reads: "Send the Lamb, O Lord, the Ruler of the earth from the rock in the wilderness to the mountain of the daughter of Sion." Toward the end of Advent this passage will occur several times as an expression of longing for the Messiah.

There are several oracles over the Egyptians in chapter 19 of Isaias that merit attention.

An oracle over Egypt:
Behold, I, the Lord will ride upon a swift cloud,
and come to Egypt.
And Egypt's idols will shake in my presence,
and Egyptian hearts will fall victim to despair . . . .

prepare the way
for the lord,
smoothen the path
for our god✚

I will deliver Egypt into the power of a cruel lord,
and a fierce king will govern her.

There follows a description of the punishment decreed for Egypt, a punishment not without blessing (vv. 16 ff.):

In that day there will be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt and a monument to God at its borders. These will serve as a sign and as testimony to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt. If men then cry to God because of their oppressors, he will send them a Savior who will defend and deliver them. Thus will God reveal himself to the Egyptians, and in that day the Egyptians will acknowledge God and will prepare bloody and unbloody offerings and will make vows and fulfill them. Yes, God will smite the Egyptians with healing blows; they will return to God and he will show himself merciful to them and heal them.

In that day a road will stretch from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrians and the Egyptians will become allied by marriage and worship God together. In that day Israel will be a third party with the Egyptians and the Assyrians, a blessing upon the earth confirmed by the Lord of hosts with these words: 'Blessed be my people, Egypt; and Assyria, the work of my hands; and Israel, my inheritance.'

This prophecy is significant in the light of the great role Egypt has played in the history of salvation and of the Church. Recall that the Jews lived in Egypt; Christ went there as an Infant; and Christianity flourished there for centuries (the monks of the desert).

2. The Responsories voice our yearning for the Lamb of God, the Virgin's Son:

Christ our King is coming!
He is the Lamb whom John announced would come —
the Lamb before whom kings would stand with
closed mouths, and Gentiles would adore.

Long, long ago Ezechiel uttered this prophecy:
'I saw a closed door.
And lo, God eternal passed through it for the world's salvation!
And it was closed again.'
It was a figure of the Virgin,
who with child-birth remained a Virgin still.
Through that door you saw, the Lord alone shall pass.

The morning antiphon: "Behold, I am sending My angel who shall prepare My way before your face" (*Ben. Ant.*). In the evening: "You shall yet be built anew, O Sion, and you shall see the Righteous One, who shall come to you" (*Magn. Ant.*).

3. Adveniat regnum tuum — Thy kingdom come. The second Sunday of Advent was dedicated to the messianic and heavenly Jerusalem, viz., the kingdom of God. During the first week we dwelt more upon the *adveniat;* during this second week we should concentrate upon the *regnum.* It is important that we bear in our hearts a correct, profound and thorough understanding of the kingdom of God. What is its nature? (1) Approaching the problem negatively, we must be on our guard against (a) a purely legalistic concept of Christianity as might be gathered from its laws and canons alone — you must do this, you must avoid that; for such an act you will be rewarded and for such an act, punished. This is not to say that the commandments are unimportant in the kingdom of God; but they are not the kingdom of God itself. "He who loves Me Keeps My commandments." "Once you were darkness but now light; walk as children of the light." (b) Much less is the kingdom of God to be equated with the external organization or the temporal vesture of the Church. Its earthly elements, from the natural frailty of priests to the artificial flowers on the altar, do not constitute the kingdom of God. It is God's will that His kingdom appear in human guise; but this guise is not its essence. Christ said: "Blessed is he who is not scandalized in Me."

2) Approaching the problem in an affirmative way, the king-

dom of God is (a) a kingdom in the world but not of the world; it has no earthly bounds. It is invisible to the eye of men, for it is a kingdom of the spirit, a kingdom of souls, but nonetheless real. Christ said: "The kingdom of God comes unawares. Neither will they say 'Behold, here it is,' or 'Behold, there it is.' For behold, the kingdom of God is within you" (Lk. 17:21). (b) The kingdom of God is Life. To our natural life it adds another Life, a much fuller Life, of which the natural is but a shadow. This Life is so strong that it is unaffected by the death of the body. We like to live. Let us then flee into God's kingdom to obtain a rich, full, and eternal Life. When Christ spoke of it, He added: "And I will raise him from the dead on the last day." This Life must become ever more abundant, more rich, more firmly established within us. We know, too, that this Life vivifies not only individual souls but also the whole, great Body which is the Church. Of this Body the Christian is a living member.

c) The kingdom of God is Light. Not physical light, of course, but inner, invisible Light. Natural light is but a symbol of the Light of God's kingdom. Christ is the great Light, its source; the Christian is light from this Light. The soul of the child of God radiates this Light; the soul of the child of the world remains plunged in darkness and the shadow of death. St. Paul notes how Christians shine in the midst of a perverse generation like stars in the dark heavens (Phil. 2:16). This Light divinely enkindled in the depth of the soul, the Christian must preserve and nourish and make brighter. It must be increased; if yours resembles a ten-watt bulb, make it a thousand-watt beacon. (d) In the Preface for the Mass of Christ the King, God's kingdom is described as "a realm of truth and of life, of holiness and of grace, of justice, of love and of peace." Invisibly grace effects transfiguration and beatitude. Grace is where God truly "lives and reigns."

3) Now how does this kingdom grow and flourish? Do not imagine that any purely natural means suffices. It does not flourish because of propaganda, force, sensationalism, or money. Christ's temptation proved that. Satan had planned to dazzle

Jesus, he wanted to build the kingdom with material means. But the kingdom of grace can be built only by means of grace — prayer, the sacraments, love, suffering, humility, the Eucharist in particular, and the Word of God. *More basic work for Advent.*

THURSDAY IN THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

God will ready a groaning board
with victuals rich and full of marrow

1. Scripture Reading. From the section known as the Apocalypse of Isaias (ch. 24—27), we take the following "Thanksgiving Hymn of the Saved" (Is. 25:1–5).

Yahweh, you are my God.
Gratefully I will praise your name.
For you have accomplished wonders,
trustworthy and true to your oracles of old.
For you have made the city a heap,
its fortifications a ruin;
and the palace of the proud a pile of stones —
never again will they be rebuilt.
Therefore mighty peoples will honor you,
and cruel nations will fear you.
For you have been a refuge to the weak and needy,
a protection to the poor in distress;
A shelter from the storm, a shade from the heat,
for the blast of tyrants is like a winter torrent.
You quell the noise of the arrogant,
you silence the singing of the ruthless.

The blessings of the messianic era are poetically described in the following verses (6–8):

Upon this mountain the Lord of hosts
will ready for all peoples
a groaning board, a flowing wine-fest,
with victuals rich and full of marrow,
and wine sparkling clear from dregs.
And upon this mountain he will destroy
the veil that veils all people,
the cover that covers all nations.
Then will he destroy death forever!
And the Lord God will wipe away
the tears from all faces,
and he will take away shame from his people
over all the earth. The Lord has spoken.

Another wonderful promise which has been fulfilled through grace.

2. **Advent Responsories.** Again our thoughts center on the heavenly Sion:

Behold, the Lord shall come,
and all His saints with Him.
In that day a great light shall arise,
and they shall go out from Jerusalem like clean water.
And the Lord shall rule over all peoples forever.
Behold, the Lord is coming in power,
exercising might and authority,
having His kingdom well in hand.

At sunrise we greet our Lord: "O Lord, You are the One who is to come! We have been awaiting You; do save Your people." It is the Church's answer to the question in last Sunday's Gospel. At sundown, too, the words on our lips come from John the Baptist: "The One who will come after me existed before me; the latchet of His shoes I am not worthy to loose" (*Magn. Ant.*).

Today's lessons and responsories are quite positive in content. Through meditation we will deepen our appreciation of God's

glorious kingdom and our sense of gratitude for having become its citizens and heirs, which should intensify our desire for the fullest possible share in this kingdom through grace.

3. God's Kingdom in All Its Fullness. See p. 166.

FRIDAY IN THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

Blessed are all who expectantly await the Lord

1. Scripture Reading. The prophet consoles downfallen Jerusalem (Is. 30:18–28):

The Lord delays so that he may be merciful to you,
and he exalts himself so that he may show pity.
For he is a God of justice.
Blessed are all who expectantly await him.
You people who dwell in Sion,
no longer must you weep;
For, surely, he will have mercy on you.
The moment he hears your cry, he will answer;
the Lord will give you bread and water;
He will not permit your teacher to go far from you,
your own eyes will see your teacher;
your ears will hear the words of your teacher:
This is the way, walk in it,
and do not veer away either to the right or to the left.
Then the Lord will give rain to the seedings
which you have made in your soil.
Your kernels of wheat will be full and meaty,
your cattle will graze in luscious meadows. . . .
Streams and brooks of running waters will flow
on every mountain and on every lofty hill. . . .
The light of the moon will resemble the light of the sun,
while the light of the sun will be seven times brighter —
like the light of seven days —

in the day when the Lord will bind up the wounds of
his people
and heal the stripes with which he smote them.
See, the Name of the Lord comes from afar,
ablaze is his anger and heavy to bear;
His lips are filled with indignation
and his tongue is like a devouring fire;
His breath is like a raging torrent,
rising, rising till it reaches one's neck;
He comes to destroy the nations . . . .
Then you will sing songs as in the holy night (Christmas),
and your hearts will rejoice
as when to the music of the flute
one journeys to the mountain of the Lord,
to the Mighty One of Israel.
And the Lord will make his glorious voice resound (Intr.).

This passage can very easily be applied to Advent. The Savior is coming to comfort Jerusalem and to judge her enemies. He will distribute grace lavishly.

2. **Advent Responsories.** Seldom are the antiphons and responses more joyous, more consoling:

As a mother comforts her children,
so will I comfort you, says the Lord.
My help will come to you from Jerusalem,
the city I have chosen.
This you will see, and your heart will rejoice.
To Sion I will give salvation,
and my glory to Jerusalem.

The major antiphons breathe a holy expectancy: "Tell the timid: Cheer up! See, the Lord our God is coming" (*Ben. Ant.*). "Sing a new song to the Lord; let His praises resound to the ends of the earth" (*Magn. Ant.*).

Today's liturgy offers a closer view of the coming Savior. He is our Comforter (Simeon speaks of the "consolation of Israel");

He is our Teacher, our Protector, our King. How heartening to compare the promise with its fulfillment!

3. The Word of God in Advent. "Everything that has been written was written for our benefit, that through the patience and comfort derived from the Scriptures, we might have hope." This passage from last Sunday's Epistle purposes to encourage our use of the Scriptures. According to St. Paul, Holy Scripture is for our instruction and its primary purpose is to give hope. Through use of the Bible, therefore, we should become strengthened in the virtue of hope, one of the principal driving forces of Christianity. In the path of hope follow patience and consolation. When the star of hope is shining, we are able to bear up under the stresses of daily life and we find comfort even in difficult and unpleasant situations. How, we may ask, does the Bible strengthen our hope? By proclaiming God and His kingdom, by freeing us from attachment to material goods through the promise of eternal values, and by bringing us the *euanggelion* or good tidings. That is why Advent is the most propitious time for the prayerful reading of Sacred Scripture.

More profound still than St. Paul's words concerning the Scriptures are those uttered by Christ Himself. To the woman who so highly praised His Mother, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that nourished you," Christ replied: "Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it" (Lk. 11:28). Note carefully His words. Jesus tells us that we can, in a sense, become His mother by hearing and keeping the word of God. Christ, therefore, is so vitally present in the divine message that anyone who takes that message into his heart "bears" the Lord like a mother; and whoever keeps that word and makes it his own spiritually, takes Christ to his breast. Thus through the word of God we become Christ-bearers and Christ-nourishers, in short, mothers unto Christ. Mary is our Advent model in the task of hearing and keeping God's Word.

As we prepare to read Holy Scripture, let us put ourselves in Mary's place, ready for the angel Gabriel with his annunciation message. With what reverence and submission would we

then receive the word of God into our souls! And how we would strive to keep it and carry it in our hearts, as if it were the Christ Child Himself! Our Advent labor is to prepare our minds for the word of God. May it not fall on rocky ground, nor by the way, nor among thorns, but upon rich soil where it can bring forth its fruit.

SATURDAY IN THE SECOND WEEK OF ADVENT

We will see the King in all His beauty

1. **Scripture Reading.** With words from the prophet Isaias we express our deep desire for the coming Lord (Is. 33:2–6):

> O Lord, be merciful to us; for we are awaiting you.
> Be our arm of strength every morning, our salvation in time of need.
> At the voice of your angel the peoples flee;
> and when you raise yourself up, the nations scatter. . . .
> The Lord is exalted, he dwells on high,
> he fills Sion with judgment and righteousness.
> Faithfulness will dwell among men in your time,
> salvation in the wealth of wisdom and knowledge;
> while the fear of the Lord is his treasure.

This is a beautiful Advent prayer. The kingdom of God, however, imposes certain obligations. Who, the prophet asks, will inhabit God's kingdom? (33:14–17):

> Who among you can dwell with the devouring fire?
> Who can live with the everlasting flames?
> He who walks righteously and speaks the truth.
> He who despises all gain from extortion,
> who seconds no evil venture for some vile pay;
> who stops his ears lest he hear of bloodshed,
> who closes his eyes lest they lust for evil —

This man will dwell on high, his housé a rock immovable;
bread will never fail him, nor water ever be lacking.
He will see the King in all his beauty.

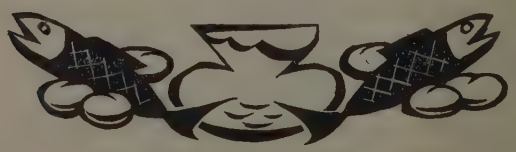
2. The Responsories. Matins' first response challenges the mystic within us:

The Lord will come from Samaria
toward the gate facing the East.
He will proceed to Bethlehem,
walking upon the waters of Judah's redemption.
Then shall everyone be saved:
For, behold, He is coming!
His throne will be founded upon mercy,
and He will sit upon it with fidelity.

Anxiously we await the Lord:

Hasten, Lord, please do not delay.
Deliver Your people!
Come, Lord, please delay no longer,
pardon the crimes of Your people.

The morning antiphon presents a vision of the Church embracing all peoples: "The Lord will raise high the standard of victory among the nations, and He will gather together the outcasts of Israel" (*Ben. Ant.*). Vespers, as usual, provide a preview of the following Sunday.



THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT
CHRISTMAS JOY ANTICIPATED

Now the Lord is nigh! Come, let us adore

We are now at the mid-point of the Advent season. Until today Matins began with: "Come, let us adore the King who is to come" (*Invit.*); but tonight we pray: "Now the Lord is nigh! Come, let us adore."

The coming week is of high liturgical import, undoubtedly one of the most profound and beautiful weeks of the Church year. First we experience the anticipatory joy of Christmas on Rose Sunday. Then come the Ember Days, so wholly devoted to preparation for Christmas, especially the *Missa aurea* on Ember Wednesday. Finally, during this week there will occur the first of the O-antiphons, expressive of such intense desire for the Redeemer. As the days pass we are caught up in the steadily accelerating Advent liturgy sweeping us on to Christmas.

1. A Day of Rejoicing. On this third Sunday of Advent the liturgy bids Christians to rejoice. Strange as it may seem, there is still a rather widespread notion that only irresponsible teenagers or atheistic millionaires are able to and do enjoy themselves. That all Christians, whether old or young, rich or poor, sick or healthy, should have happy hearts comes as a revelation to many; and those who do understand do not seem able to show it in their lives. But today the Church propounds this truth so powerfully that there can be no further doubting. At the very outset she proclaims: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice!"

But, dear Mother Church, do you not see the distress of so many thousands who are suffering, who are starving? Do you not see the sad state of all those souls who cause you and others streams of tears? Are you blind to all the grief upon this earth? How, then, can one rejoice? Dear children, I do see it all. I know suffering better than any of you do. My motherly heart feels each shaft of pain that afflicts my children or that my children

cause me. And yet I rejoice and bid all of you to rejoice. Why? Because you are children of God; because Christ is your Brother; because heaven is your home; in short, because you are divinely privileged. After all, how long does earthly life last? It is like a bad dream which vanishes with waking. While in heaven we will be rich, happy, beautiful, and healthy forever.

Oh, Mother Church, heaven is so far away, and this earthly life is so hard and lasts so long. And who knows . . . Now listen. Do you know, my children, why you do not have true joy? Because you lack a deep, full, strong, and lively faith. Yes, I admit, faith means walking in the dark — in some respects. The dove of eternal glory sits upon heaven's high roof while the sparrow of present satisfaction is in your hand. To release the sparrow in order to get the dove, that requires faith. Only a virile Christianity consciously aware of divine Life and full of such faith that it can sacrifice earthly thrills for eternal peace, only this true and genuine Christianity can attain perfect joy. Nevertheless, it is such Christian joy and such Christian faith which Mother Church expects of us today: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice!"

2. With Saturday's Vespers Sunday's liturgy begins. The light, joysome ring of the antiphons reveals tomorrow's mood. "The Lord will come, He will not tarry. He will illumine things hidden in darkness and manifest Himself to all peoples, alleluia." Jerusalem must not curb her joy: "Rejoice exceedingly, O Jerusalem, for your Savior is coming to you, alleluia." Immediately the Lord appears and says: "I will give salvation to Sion and My glory to Jerusalem, alleluia." To which we respond, voicing our deepest Advent sentiments: "Every mountain and every hill will be leveled, the crooked will be straightened and the rough places made even. Lord, come! please do not delay, alleluia." Lastly we raise our sights to the parousia: "We must live virtuously and innocently, desiring that blessed hope: the advent of the Lord." As the night falls the Lord Himself speaks: "Before Me no god existed, neither will there be one after Me; for

unto Me every knee must bow; and every tongue must praise Me." In the Magnificat we voice our praise to God, eternal and unique: "My soul magnifies the Lord."

Technical note: Some confusion could arise in using this calendar during the next two weeks, since certain antiphons, e.g., the O-antiphons, are assigned to particular dates. To lessen complications I have transferred these to the sanctoral portion (see page 176), which follows a chronological sequence.

THIRD SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Station at St. Peter's

1. Gaudete Sunday: A Joyous Day in Advent. Like children awaiting the Christ Child, we are hardly able to restrain our happiness over the coming of the Lord. Actually it is Christmas joy anticipated. The Church modifies her colors; instead of violet she uses rose, a softened hue of violet and thus a compromise between the colors symbolizing penance and joy. Unlike other days in Advent, the altar is adorned with flowers; organ music is permitted; and at the High Mass the assistant ministers again wear the tunic and dalmatic. Persons who love the liturgy should celebrate such extraordinary days in a special manner and make the most of their distinguishing features. The color rose ought predominate in the church (vestments, altar hangings) and in

the home too (at the dinner table, for example). Pastors could use the occasion to preach on the adornment proper to the house of God. Rarely is the Church's mood so unmistakable.

Of course, our Advent joy must be deepened and purified; this is done through the day's liturgy. Let us take account of where we stand. On the first Sunday the Redeemer was yet at a distance: "You will see the Son of man coming . . . lift your heads, for your redemption is near." On the second Sunday we heard the divine Physician say of Himself: "The blind see . . . the dead arise . . ." (His program of redemption). Today the Baptist announces: "He stands in your midst." Still we "do not yet know Him" as we hope to one day. For now we only know Him through faith and through the holy mysteries. The Gospel message, however, resembles the tidings on Christmas. The whole day is imbued with deep, reserved joy and reverent emotion. The two points liturgically stressed are: Rejoice (1) for the Lord is near; and (2) He is in your midst.

Now doesn't this involve a contradiction? How can the Lord *be near* and *in our midst* at the same time? The liturgy alone has the answer: Christ is in us, among us, because we are members of His Body. But He is also near because we are expecting a new, more glorious manifestation. He is in our midst in the holy mysteries; He is near because the life of a Christian invites a continual revelation of divine wisdom, and an awaiting of His final coming. He is near inasmuch as we are still in the season of Advent preparation; He is in our midst inasmuch as He daily comes to us in the Eucharist. That is how the liturgy resolves the contradiction—Christ dwells in God's children through grace, and yet He is ever revealing Himself anew.

2. The Lord is near. This, today's lead idea, is our best motive for joy. It is advanced at Matins by the prophet Isaias in his joyful song for Advent and redemption (Is. 26:1–14):

> In that day this song will be sung
> in the land of Judah:
> Sion, you are our strong city;
> instead of walls and bulwarks you have the Savior!

Open wide the gates that the righteous nation
which keeps the truth may enter.
The ancient error has vanished; it is peace you give —
a peace in which we trust.
Trust in the Lord forever,
in the Lord, our strong God, forever.
For he humbled those who dwelt on high,
and cast down the proud city.
He cast them down to the very ground,
and trampled them to the dust.
The foot trod them down,
the feet of the poor, the soles of the needy.
The path of the just man is straight,
level the road upon which the pious walk.
In the path of your judgments, O Lord, have we awaited
you;
our yearning is for your Name and your thoughts.
My soul longs for you in the night;
I awake in the morning with my heart desiring you.

Apt words indeed to express our longing for the Savior and for the grace of Christmas.

St. Paul, however, is the best spokesman on today's joyous spirit. His Epistle sets the tone, not only for he Mass, but for the entire liturgy. "Brethren, rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Show your unassuming, orderly conduct to all men; for the Lord is near. Throw away all anxious cares, and bring your needs to God in prayer and supplication joined to gratitude. And may God's peace, blessed beyond comprehension, protect your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord."

What is Paul's message? As he wrote these words, he was thinking of Christ's Second Coming. But today the Church applies them to the three comings of the Lord. Christmas is near — the anniversary of His first coming; near, too, is is His coming through grace in today's Mass, in every Mass, and especially at Christmas; and His final coming likewise is imminent.

Matins are enhanced by beautiful responsories:

See, the Lord will appear upon a shining cloud
and with Him thousands of His saints!
On His vesture and on His sash is written:
King of kings and Lord of lords.
He will surely come; He does not lie.
Though He tarries, wait for Him;
for He will surely, surely come.

O Bethlehem, you are the city of the Most High God.
Out of you will come forth the Ruler in Israel.
His origin will resemble the days of eternity,
and He will be great upon all the earth.
His coming will mean peace to our earth.
He will speak peace to the Gentiles,
and will rule from sea to sea.

At dawn the Church beholds her King enthroned in light: "He will sit upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom forever, alleluia" (*Ben. Ant.*). The moments of the sun's setting are dedicated to the Mother of God: "Blessed are you, Mary, because you believed the Lord. The things which the Lord told you will indeed be fulfilled in you, alleluia" (*Magn. Ant.*). What beautiful harmony exists between this antiphon and the Magnificat, the thanksgiving song of the Mother of God!

3. He is in your midst. The day's most joyous message comes from John the Baptist (*Gospel*). Confronted by the legation from the Sanhedrin, he spoke assuringly to them and to us: "I baptize with water, but in your midst He stands whom you do not know. He it is who will come after me, though He existed before me; His sandal-strap I am not worthy to loose." The Baptist's message is very true: although we await the Lord, we already possess Him! Each *Dominus vobiscum* cries out to us: your nobility, O Christian, stems from Christ's dwelling within you, from the fact that you are a Christ-bearer and a Christ-bringer. Take Mary,

the Mother of God, as your sublime model in the task of bearing Christ in your hearts through life.

St. John is also our Advent preacher. "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord." His cry was directed not only to the Jewish people but to the Church as long as she remains a pilgrim. Each year during the four weeks of Advent he exhorts us Christians: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths." Note the progression in the three messages just considered. First came one of joyous desire (Isaias); the second bade us rejoice over the approaching Lord (St. Paul); and the third already sees the Lord in our midst. Now He can appear truly in the holy Sacrifice.

4. Holy Mass (Gaudete). Today's stational church is the burial place of the Prince of the apostles, St. Peter. (The texts make no reference to the station.) The *Introit* fulfills its purpose perfectly, i.e., it sets the tone for the Mass and for the day: "Rejoice in the Lord; again I say, rejoice. For the Lord is near!" With these words the Church greets us as we enter. Again it is a double coming that we joyfully await — Christ's coming in the flesh and His coming in glory, both of which are fulfilled at Mass. In response to these glad tidings we sing Psalm 84, the "Psalm of Redemption" (used three times today — at the Introit, Offertory, Communion — the three processions).

The *Collect* plays upon the nature-motif of darkness and light: May God enlighten the darkness of our souls through the grace of His visit. This is a departure from the typical *Excita* (Stir up . . .) prayer, but nonetheless a wonderful Advent Collect. The *Epistle* is unusually brief. Its principal sentence was used very effectively in the Introit: *The Lord is near* in His coming at Christmas, in His coming in the grace of the Mass, and in His final coming. The Redeemer is giving us a foretaste of Christmas joy and peace. The *Gradual* is a longing plea for redemption, a *Rorate* of unredeemed and redeemed mankind (Psalm 79), and also a *Maranatha*, i.e., a plea for the parousia. Framed by alleluias, the *Alleluia* verse is a typical Advent prayer.

As already noted, the *Gospel* depicts John's encounter with the

representatives of the Sanhedrin, who wanted to test his prophetical mission. To realize the importance of the Baptist's testimony we must lift the passage out of its historical framework. "In your midst there stands One whom you do not know. He it is who is to come after me, who existed before me; His sandal-strap I am not worthy to loose." To the liturgy this means that Christ is present in His Church until the end of time. But since He is present in an invisible manner, we do not know Him. We will know Him only at His Second Coming. Nevertheless, He is the eternal God, the promised Redeemer!

At the *Offertory* we again chant Psalm 84 (which actually is more proper to Christmas than to Advent). It is the Messiah who "blesses the land" of the soul and "turns away the captivity" caused by sin. Coming at the beginning of the Sacrifice proper, it shows that our soul's greatest desire has been fulfilled. The *Secret* is somewhat cryptic: "May the Sacrifice which is daily offered fulfill the end for which You instituted this sacred mystery; and may it effect your salvation in us." In short, God is coming with the graces of redemption. The sacrificial oblation is the fulfillment of the Foremass. While the Lord "is near" and "in our midst" during the latter, He "abides in us and we in Him" in the Eucharist.

Bearing the Eucharist as pledge in our hearts, we pray the *Communion* verse with absolute confidence: "Tell the timid: take courage and do not fear; behold, our God will come and save us." The *Postcommunion* reminds us that this Sacrifice is not the final fulfillment of our Advent desire but still a preparation for the coming feast.

The beauty of today's Mass formulary lies in the fact that "the joy of possessing Him who is near and the cry to Him who is afar off are combined in wonderful harmony. The Mass expresses the essence of the Church's Advent" (Aemiliana Loehr).

5. Reflections on the Introit. Because of its important bearing on the Sunday, the Introit merits further consideration. It has three parts: (a) the lead idea: the Lord is near; (b) the exhortation to rejoice; and (c) the moral lesson.

a) *The Lord is near.* This "nearness" constitutes the focal point of today's liturgy and is our primary motive for joy. Yet, we may ask, what is its specific implication, from a practical viewpoint? Earlier I suggested that instead of the word *Lord* we should say the *kingdom of God*. It is easier for us to desire grace (the kingdom of God) than to await the Savior. Therefore, today's message is: the kingdom of God is near, it is in our midst; in fact, it is within us. This kingdom is not something externally visible but something entirely interior, holy, supernatural. It is neither morality nor virtue nor freedom from sin. It is Life, that higher Life which is unaffected by physical death. It is that spiritual Light which banishes blindness from the soul. It is peace and love and truth. It is the most precious treasure imaginable, and carried in our frail bodies! It is the Triune God Himself who abides in this kingdom, its vivifying soul being the Holy Spirit.

Now this kingdom is not far distant, it is within us. Where two or three members of the Mystical Body are gathered, there the Body is also, for the members cannot exist apart from the Body. This holds true for the family, the community, the parish, the diocese, the entire Church. And where the Body is, there also is the Head, there also is Christ. Let us cultivate a lively awareness that the kingdom of God is actually tangible in the Church and in the family; that Christ stands in our midst.

b) *Rejoice!* The above reflections give solid basis to our rejoicing. The kingdom of God is our highest good. Had we but a strong faith in this doctrine, all the troubles of life could not dampen our joy. The kingdom of God is the foundation of Christian optimism. The Christian, then, should be a bearer of peace, radiating joy. Only a person in the state of grace can experience true joy. And who, if not the Christian, can be expected to preserve this heavenly gift for the world? A true, deep joy here is the earnest of heavenly joy hereafter.

c) *The moral lesson.* It is not theologically accurate to place the full essence of Christianity in upright, moral living, doing good and avoiding evil. Morality is not the ultimate. The es-

sence of Christian life is the kingdom of God, supernatural grace. Morality is a necessary sequel. Since we are privileged to have God living in our hearts and to have His kingdom developing within us, it follows that we must live virtuously. How nobly we would live, if we were convinced of bearing God's kingdom within us. We would be models of that *modestia* spoken of in the Introit. The word almost defies translation — modesty, decency, good conduct; let your noble Christian bearing be known to all men. That lofty conviction would produce a second effect, viz., absence of anxious concern over daily needs. God, our Father, will provide! Seek first the kingdom of God and all the rest will be added. One final admonition. If you really have cares, you still retain a powerful means of help — prayer. Lighten your heavy heart through prayer. God lives in His kingdom within your soul; He will not ignore you.

MONDAY IN THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

The Servant of God

1. Scripture Reading. In an exceptionally beautiful poem the prophet Isaias presents the Messiah as our Redeemer, as the "Servant of God" (Is. 42:1–7).

Behold, my Servant whom I have chosen,
my elect, in whom I delight.
I put my spirit upon him
that he might bring justice to the Gentiles.
He will not shout or show partiality,
neither will he make noise in the street.
He will not break the bruised reed,
or quench the smoking flax.
Faithfully he will impose justice,
and never become downcast or violent.

He will sow judgment on the earth;
and the isles will await His teaching.

Now the heavenly Father addresses His Son directly:

I, the Lord, call you in righteousness,
I grasp your hand and protect you.
I will make you the redeemer of the people,
a light to the Gentiles,
to open the eyes of the blind,
to bring the prisoners out of dungeons,
and those who sit in darkness out of their house of bondage.

St. Matthew quotes this passage in his Gospel (Mt. 12:17–21). How well it describes the Savior.

2. Advent Responsories.

See, the Lord will appear upon a shining cloud
and with Him thousands of His saints!
On His vesture and on His sash is written:
King of kings and Lord of lords.
He will surely come; He does not lie;
Though He tarries, wait for Him;
for He will surely, surely come.

He who is to come, will come; He will not tarry.
Fear will vanish from our borders,
for He is our Savior.
He will take away all our guilt,
and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

The major antiphons: "There will come forth a bud out of the root of Jesse, and the whole earth will be filled with the glory of the Lord; all flesh will see the salvation of God." What an impressive song as the sun, the symbol of Christ, rises to flood the earth with glory! At the evening sacrifice of praise our thoughts turn to the Mother of God as we sing with her: "All

generations shall call me blessed, for God has regarded the lowliness of His handmaid."

The picture of Christ is becoming increasingly clearer. As points for meditation today we could take: (1) Christ in prophecy; (2) Christ in the Gospels (i.e., the prophecies fulfilled); (3) Christ in the liturgy. Or more briefly: Christ in history and Christ in mystery.

3. Psalm 84. This psalm is used three times in the Mass of the third Sunday of Advent — Introit, Offertory, and Communion — an indication that it expresses the Church's mind. Because of its theme, messianic salvation, it is used often during Advent. On the first Sunday it was chanted at the Alleluia and Communion; on the second, at the Offertory; and today it is the lead psalm of the entire formulary. At Christmas Matins it will be prayed in its entirety. Actually Psalm 84 is more a Christmas hymn than an Advent psalm.

Rejoice! God has ended our bondage: vv. 2–4

You have favored your land, O Lord;
you have brought Jacob back from bondage.
You have forgiven the guilt of your people;
you have covered all their sins.
You have mollified your wrath;
you have smothered the flame of your anger.

New, unexpected suffering: vv. 5–8

Restore us, O God of our well-being,
and turn your anger from us.
Why be angry with us forever?
prolonging your wrath from generation to generation?
O God, give us life again
and your people will rejoice in you.
Show us your mercy, O Lord,
and grant us your salvation.

Aid will arrive: vv. 9–14

I will be attentive and hear what the Lord will say.
Peace, surely, will he speak to his people —
to his faithful ones and to those
who sincerely turn to him.
His salvation is near to all who fear him,
therefore glory will again fill our land.
Mercy and truth will meet,
justice and peace will kiss.
Truth will spring up out of the earth,
and justice look down from heaven.
The Lord will bestow his blessings,
and our land will yield her produce.
Justice will precede him,
and peace will follow his footsteps.

The psalmist begins with a reference to Israel's release from the Babylonian captivity. Their initial joy was soon dampened by new and unexpected suffering in the homeland. Disappointed, the sacred author takes comfort in looking forward to the messianic era.

For us Psalm 84 is a song of spiritual deliverance. Our redemption is achieved in two phases; one involves uncertainty and suffering, the other celestial glory. During the first phase we patiently live and hope for the parousia; during the second our joy will be perfect. With this background, the key lines of the psalm might be paraphrased thus: "You favored this once cursed earth, O God, by sending the Savior. Through His suffering and death, You blotted out all guilt of sin." Redemption has been completed (objective redemption); it remains for the individual to make it his own (subjective redemption). This is the object of our petition in the final verse of the second strophe — a beautiful Advent ejaculation. The verse is also used near the end of the prayers at the foot of the altar at every holy Mass: *Ostende nobis, Domine, misericordiam tuam*; *et salutare tuum da nobis.*

The third strophe gives God's joyous reply and the glorious

prospect of heaven: Yes, you too will be saved — here on earth through grace and hereafter in glory, if you are among those who "put their hope in Him." "His salvation is near." "His glory (viz., His mercy, truth, justice, peace) will fill our land." The soil of your soul will yield her produce, abundantly. Yes, Jesus is walking through the earth, justice preceding Him and peace following. Pray this psalm often during the coming days.

TUESDAY IN THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

Let the earth open and bring forth salvation

1. **Scripture Reading.** Isaias beholds the Messiah enthroned by His heavenly Father (Is. 45:1–8). Cyrus, Israel's deliverer, prefigured the true Deliverer; therefore the prophet's words apply to Christ in a very real sense.

Thus says the Lord to his anointed (Cyrus),
whose right hand he grasped
to subdue nations before him,
to put kings to flight,
to open all doors before him,
with none remaining closed:
I will go before you
and will humble the great ones of the earth;
I will break to pieces gates of brass,
and smash iron bars.
I will give you hidden treasures
and the riches concealed in secret places.
For you should know that I, Yahweh,
have called you by name, I, Israel's God.
For the sake of my servant Jacob
and for my chosen people Israel
have I called you by name.

And I gave you a name of importance
before you even knew me.
I girded you before you knew me;
that from the rising of the sun to its setting,
men should know:
There is none besides me.
I am the Lord and there is no other.
I bring peace and cause misfortune;
I, Yahweh, do all these things.
Give rain, O heavens, from above,
let the skies pour down righteousness;
Let the earth open and bring forth salvation,
and let justice spring up likewise.
I, Yahweh, will do this.

This passage gives our Advent prayer, *Rorate,* in its original context.

2. The Responsories are becoming ever more joyous. Our holy longing is producing a joyous confidence.

Weep not, O Egypt, for your Sovereign will come to you,
and the depths will tremble at His presence.
He is coming to deliver His people from the hand of the mighty.
See, the Lord of hosts, your God, is coming with great power.

At dawn the sun rises over Bethlehem: "You, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, you are not the least of all! Out of you the Ruler will come who will rule My people Israel" (*Ben. Ant.*). "Awake, awake and stand up, O Jerusalem! Strike off the bands from your neck, O captive daughter of Sion" (*Magn. Ant.*).

Again the texts show us the Messiah. Always He is the King to whom God has given power above all kings, He breaks asunder bolts and gates, to Him belong hidden treasures, before Him the depths tremble, He bestows justice and perfect peace, and will be born at little Bethlehem. It makes a profitable meditation to find these various features in the Biblical narrative.

3. Ave Maria. Advent's heralds, Isaias and John the Baptist,

have been urging us to meet the two dispositions required on our part for the reception of God's Christmas gift, divine grace. How to respond to sanctifying grace is shown us by Mary our Mother, Advent's third inspiring figure.

First let us see how the liturgy presents Mary during this season. Mary lends to these weeks a tender and lovely air. Isaias and John are men of strength; Mary, the holy Virgin, adds a perfecting touch through her soft and tender demeanor. Already on the first Sunday of Advent the liturgy took us to the great Marian basilica at Rome (also famed as the Church of the Crib) for a foretaste of Christmas joy. The season's Votive Mass is in her honor; and the hours of Divine Office close with the beautiful Marian hymn, *Alma Redemptoris Mater*. Antiphons and responsories frequently tell her privileges. The closer we approach to Christmas, the greater the number of texts treating of Mary. The first two Ember Days this week are devoted to the Mother of God, recalling in mystery the annunciation and the visitation. Finally, Christian piety bespeaks her further glory in the Rorate Mass and in the Angelus. Popular and liturgical piety follow Mary's lead in awaiting the Lord.

Who could better teach us how to await the Savior, how to bear Him, how to make our hearts His cradle, who, indeed, could better teach us than Mary? No one ever kept Advent as she did. Isaias presents us with the Advent of mankind, especially of Gentile mankind; John shows us the Advent of the Jewish people; in Mary is symbolized the Advent of the Christian soul. With tender fondness the liturgy compares the soul to Mary. How did she await the Lord? With a calm and peaceful heart, with deep and silent prayer. How appropriately painters of the annunciation depict Mary at prayer! God comes to us only if our hearts are quiet and composed. But how rarely do our souls enjoy such calm. At least during the following days strive to await the Lord with Mary in greater stillness and silence. Maintain a quiet, recollected, and prayerful spirit.

There remains yet another and still more sublime consideration. We know how Christianity can be summarized under the

three headings: faith, commandments, grace. Isaias preaches faith by inculcating holy longing; John, commandments by stressing moral reform; while in her very body Mary brings us the divine Life in Christ. She is the first and finest model for every child of God. Her divine motherhood is the sublime prototype for the loftiest goal possible to man, to harbor God in soul and body. Mary is the supreme, most perfect archetype of the divine indwelling. Now by bearing the holy Trinity in one's soul, the child of God becomes the mother of God. This is effected particularly through the holy Sacrifice of Mass; there the seed of divinity is implanted. See how the Mother of God can be your inspiration through Advent.

THE EMBER DAYS

The King takes the clothes of a servant

Another step forward in our Christmas preparation! The season began with: *The King is coming;* continued as: *Jerusalem prepares herself;* while now: *He stands in your midst.* Today the liturgy shows us our King in human form, clothed with the mean trappings of human nature. The text for the Ember Day Masses is largely culled from the Old Testament.

By way of introduction to this ancient observance, let us read an Ember sermon of Pope St. Leo I:

"Dearly beloved brethren: With the anxious solicitude proper to us as the shepherd of your souls, we urge upon you the rigid observance of this December fast. The month of December has come round again, and with it this devout custom of the Church. The fruits of the year now drawing to a close have all been gathered in, and therefore meetly do we offer our abstinence to God as a sacrifice of thanksgiving. What can be more useful than fasting? By that exercise we draw near to God, we make strong

stand against the devil, and overcome the sweet enticements of sin. Fasting has ever been the bread of strength. From fasting proceed pure thoughts, reasonable desires, and healthy counsels. Through voluntary mortification the flesh dies to lust, and the soul renews the practice of virtue.

"But since fasting is not the only means to secure health for our souls, let us adorn our fasting with works of mercy. Spend in good deeds what you withdraw from superfluity. Our fast must be turned into a banquet for the poor. Let us devote time and effort to the underprivileged, the widow and the orphan; let us show sympathy to the afflicted and reconcile the estranged; provide lodging for the wanderer and relieve the oppressed; give clothing to the naked and cherish the sick. Thus every one who offers to the God of all goodness this Advent sacrifice of fasting and alms will become worthy to receive from Him the eternal reward of His heavenly kingdom! We fast on Wednesday and Friday; and there is likewise a vigil on Saturday at the Church of St. Peter, that by his good prayers we may the more effectually obtain what we ask for, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, forever. Amen."

You may find this sermon, a masterpiece of eloquence, in the second nocturn of last Sunday's Matins.

The observance of the Ember Days, a most venerable feature of the liturgical calendar, dates back to early Roman antiquity (they are older than Advent). Pope Leo I (c. 450) has left us a series of beautiful sermons for these days. Originally the Ember Days were an occasion of thanksgiving for the three great harvests of wheat, grapes, and olives — all very meaningful nature symbols employed by the liturgy. In the Offertory procession the faithful brought tithes of the harvest to be used for the offering then and there, for the support of the Church, and for the poor.

These days also stress spiritual renewal. In the bustle of business and work, we too easily forget our future status. Therefore, during these four times of the year we should concentrate on God and scrutinize our spiritual condition. Lent is our annual retreat,

while the Ember Days serve as quarterly check-ups. A grave and earnest mood comes over Mother Church, but there are no tears or mourning. Fasting is not so much an expression of penitence and sorrow as a joyous tithe to God, and an incentive to alms-giving.

The Ember Days have the special honor of being ordination days (Saturday). In Rome Ember Saturday in December was the principal occasion for conferring Holy Orders. Pray for good priests this week. As time passed, the Ember Days were assigned specific dates four times in the Church's calendar, giving each of the Ember weeks a distinctive seasonal color. The December Ember Days, highly oriented toward Christmas, manifest a pronounced Advent character, more so than the ordinary weekdays. These Ember Days and the O-antiphons constitute our last major efforts in the work of preparing for the Savior's coming.

EMBER WEDNESDAY

Station at St. Mary Major

The Annunciation — Missa Aurea

The historical event by which God's own Son became Man, called the annunciation, is commemorated twice each year in the Roman liturgy — today on Ember Wednesday and on March 25. The latter is a Marian feast, while today's liturgy centers on our Blessed Savior, even though the stational church is St. Mary Major and much of the Mass text is devoted to the Blessed Virgin. In both cases the liturgy stresses history. March 25 commemorates the day of our Lord's conception, nine months before Christmas; on Ember Wednesday, just before Christmas, the liturgy emphasizes the Old Testament background leading to His birth. There is solemn grandeur in the mystery of today's liturgy, a grandeur which merits it a position along with the chiefest events of Jesus' life, His birth and His death.

Today the second Divine Person of the Blessed Trinity was united to a human nature, truly the beginning of mankind's salvation. It would seem that the occasion of Christ's assuming flesh should be as great a feast as Christmas. Such actually was the thinking during the Middle Ages. At that time March 25 marked the beginning of the civil year. Today's Mass, the *Missa Aurea* or "Golden Mass," was very highly esteemed. Prompted by the text of the formulary, the holy Abbot St. Bernard delivered his famous homilies entitled *Super Missus est,* which occur in part in the Breviary. The fact that the Rorate Mass, still celebrated daily in many places during Advent, is derived from this Mass, indicates wide popular interest. Among the faithful there existed intense devotion toward the mystery of the annunciation. As a result the Hail Mary was developed and added to the Our Father; and three times daily the Angelus bells pealed, reminding everyone of this sublime event in his salvation. At the phrase, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us," in the Angelus and in the Last Gospel, as also at the *Et incarnatus est*

in the Credo, a genuflection was introduced to show reverence for the mystery of the incarnation.

All this helps us to realize the wealth of meaning inherent in today's liturgy. Nor may we overlook the similarity between holy Mass and the incarnation itself. At Mass Christ becomes truly incarnate under the appearances of bread and wine. Therefore we do not merely commemorate the event; it actually is repeated in a sacramental manner. At the consecration we can say in all truth: "The Word is made flesh!" It should not be hard to understand why in former times this Mass was called *missa aurea,* the "Golden Mass."

1. **Scripture Reading.** The Breviary lessons are not taken from the prophet Isaias today. Since we have already analyzed the two excerpts from Isaias used at Mass, we will consider another passage, likewise messianic in character, that has a relation to the annunciation. It will be the first lesson at Christmas Matins (Is. 9:1–6).

In the past shame oppressed the land of Zebulun
and the land of Naphtali;
But in the future fresh glory will gladden
the Way of the Sea, Transjordania, and Galilee of the Gentiles.
The people who lived in darkness will see a great light,
upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom, a light will shine.
You will ready great jubilation and much rejoicing,
as at harvest time, or when men divide the spoil.
You will break his burdensome yoke,
the staff for his shoulder,
and the oppressor's rod, as in the day of Midian.
Booty for the fire will be every soldier's boot,
food for the flames, their blood-soaked clothing.
For unto us a Child is born,
unto us a Son is given!
The government rests upon his shoulder, and his name will be:

Wonderful-Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
He will sit upon the throne of David to establish his kingdom,
to strengthen it with justice and with righteousness thenceforth forever.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.

The above must be numbered among the most notable messianic prophecies in the Old Testament.

2. The Responsories. We should be thrilled by the wonderful melodies Mother Church repeatedly plucks from her harp:

O you who bring good tidings of peace to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with strength!
Say to the cities of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem:
See, our God is coming, the One whom we awaited.

There shall come a star out of Jacob;
a Man shall rise out of Israel.
He shall smite all the princes of the Gentiles,
and all the earth shall be His possession.
All kings shall fall down before Him,
all nations shall serve Him.

The antiphons at Lauds and Vespers make it clear that we should be preoccupied with the lofty message of the Gospel throughout the day. "The angel Gabriel was sent to Mary, a virgin espoused to Joseph" (*Ben. Ant.*). "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done unto me according to your word" (*Magn. Ant.*).

3. Holy Mass (Rorate caeli). In spirit with the Christians at Rome, we offer holy Mass today in the great Church of St. Mary Major; here the crib is venerated, which brings Bethlehem very close. Mary is our patron. She typifies the Church, for the role she played at Christ's first advent, the Church now takes in the

Savior's liturgical advent as He manifests Himself in the mysteries. The divine Dew descending from heaven falls upon her as virgin earth; she bears the heavenly One in her womb as Bride and Mother and clothes Him who is invisible with the clothes of human nature. Today's Mass, therefore, keeps a double picture before our eyes: Mary and the Church. Most texts can be applied to either; for instance, the grace-bedewed earth (*Intr.*); the house upon the mountain (*first lesson*); the Virgin Mother who gives Emmanuel to the world (*second lesson*); the Virgin who conceives (*Gosp.*).

The *Introit,* "Drop down dew, ye heavens," voices the cry of all mankind in need of redemption. We foresee its fulfillment in the rising sun of Psalm 18: "In the heavens He has made a tent for the sun; like a bridegroom from his chamber it sallies forth, happy as a strong man finishing his course; it rises at one end of the heavens and travels to the other, and nothing escapes its heat." For nine months Christ the divine Sun remains hidden in the tabernacle of Mary's womb, but at Christmas (after the winter solstice) He will come forth.

In the *first Oration* the Church asks that "the coming solemnity of our redemption" may profit us both here and hereafter. Still more beautiful is the *second Oration*: "Hasten, we beseech You, O Lord, and do not delay; help us by the consolation of Your coming." This fervent, soul-stirring plea bursts the bonds of formal, classical style. The three *Lessons,* a feature dating back to the early Roman period, indicate the antiquity of the formulary, when all Masses had three lessons. In the beautiful light of fulfillment, the first portrays the Church as the house upon a mountain to which stream all peoples to hear the peace of God (*treuga Dei*). In holy pilgrimage the Gentile nations come to Sion, the birthplace of the Church. From Sion proceed the Law and the Lawgiver (understand "the Word of God" as the Logos). Sion, moreover, prefigures Mary, from whom the divine Word proceeded.

The first *Gradual* paints a beautiful Christmas scene by its words and allusions. We stand before the closed gates of para-

dise. As the locks and chains are being withdrawn, we cry impatiently: "Gates, lift up your doors; eternal portals, open wide, that the King of glory may enter." We need but wait for the rest of the Mass to witness the King's appearance. The *Epistle* and *Gospel* bear a relationship to each other corresponding to promise and fulfillment. The prophet says: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and shall bear a Son, and His Name shall be called Emmanuel." The evangelist responds: "Blessed are thou . . . thou shalt conceive and bring forth a Son; and thou shalt call His Name Jesus. He shall be called the Son of the Most High . . . The Holy Spirit shall overshadow thee." This immortal Gospel contains one of the greatest revelations ever made to mankind.

The Foremass, we see, envelops the whole season of Advent, even to the very threshold of Christmas. Therefore, as the sacrifice proper begins, we feel quite confident: "Take courage, and fear not! Behold, our God will bring a just requital. He Himself will come to save us. Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf will hear. Then will the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb will be loosed. God Himself will come to save us" (Is. 35:4–6). At the *Secret* prayer the Church reminds us that it is a day of fasting. We bring our sacrifice of fasting to the altar. Fasting expiates the guilt of sin and leads to promised joy. The *Communion* verse reiterates the Isaian prophecy of Emmanuel's virginal birth; through the Eucharist we become participants in the truest sense of the privilege given to Mary at the annunciation — her *fiat* brings Christ into our bodies. Sweet indeed is this experience, but its effects must become evident in a renewed Christian life (*Postc.*).

The Church and the soul have been portrayed by three symbols today: as the earth moistened with dew; as the house upon a mountain harboring peace; and as a highly privileged virgin-mother. Through the Eucharist these symbols passed into reality. Truly a "Golden Mass."

4. **The Gospel.** These most ineffable words of Holy Writ

should be read with utmost reverence. The eternal, consubstantial Son of God condescends to become Man, condescends to enter the womb of a woman. Could such ever have entered the human mind!

A few reflections. The evangelist does not pass over the exact time, the place and the persons involved in the great event. The time is the sixth month after the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist (the precursor's birth is placed on June 24, and that of Christ on December 25, six months later). The place is Nazareth, a remote, little village in Galilee. The actors are Gabriel, one of the three archangels; and Mary, mentioned here for the first time in the Gospel story. Twice it is noted that she is a virgin; but she is espoused to a man of David's family having the name Joseph.

After a brief introduction, the account is developed in three stages: (a) With profound reverence the angel enters Mary's chamber. She is deep in prayer. Perhaps she had just read about the Messiah in the holy Writings. She reflects how wonderful it would be if she could be a servant to the noble woman destined to be the Messiah's mother. Suddenly she is startled by the angel; he greets her respectfully, uttering for the first time the prayer now on the lips of millions, that "eternal greeting," as one writer put it, the *Hail, Mary*. Mary is frightened and says not a word. She wonders what the greeting might mean. She will not profane the holy moment by thoughtless speech, as we probably would.

b) The angel reveals his mission. Mary is to be the Mother of the Messiah. Note carefully what the angel says of Jesus. He will be great, the Son of the Most High; His royal dignity is stressed: God will give Him the throne of David . . . He will reign in the house of Jacob . . . of His kingdom there will be no end. Mary responds with an inquiry. She had vowed to remain a virgin. How could she become a mother? "How shall this be done?" The question did not stem from a lack of faith, as in the case of Zachary. Mary is but asking "how?"

The angel has the answer ready. Her virginity will not suffer.

The Spirit and the Power of God will effect conception, and therefore the Child will not be called a son of man but the Son of God. Mary receives the news with faith; nonetheless, the angel adds a sign: her cousin Elizabeth has experienced a similar, although a lesser wonder. In her old age she too will be a mother. The seemingly impossible is possible to God. Now Mary speaks here memorable *fiat*: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord." Her utterance united earth to heaven and summoned the Son of God from His throne on high into her virginal womb. The great moment of the incarnation had come.

THURSDAY IN THE THIRD WEEK OF ADVENT

My righteous One is near

1. Scripture Reading. The prophet speaks consolingly (Is. 51:1–11):

Listen to me, you who desire salvation,
you who seek the Lord.
Look unto the rock out of which you are hewn,
and to the fountain out of which you have flowed;
look unto Abraham your father.
For I called him alone,
I blessed him and gave him increase.
Likewise the Lord will be merciful to Sion,
and show sympathy for all her ruins.
He will make her waste places into a paradise,
and her deserts a garden of the Lord.
Happiness and bliss will be found there,
thanksgiving and the singing of hymns.
Listen to me, O peoples,
give ear to me, O nations:

It is I who will give forth the Law;
and my judgments will shine as a light unto the peoples.
My righteous One is near,
my Savior is on the way.
My arm will judge the nations,
the isles will hope in me, awaiting the strength of my arm.
Lift up your eyes to the heavens,
and see the earth beneath:
For the heavens will vanish like smoke,
the earth fall to pieces like a garment,
while all its inhabitants will perish.
But my salvation will last forever,
and my righteousness will never cease.

2. The Responsories. Like the high priest of old, Christ, our Mediator, has preceded us:

He has entered (the Holy of Holies),
the Lamb without spot;
Made a High Priest forever and ever
according to the order of Melchisedech.
He is the King of justice
whose descent is from eternity.

The following responsory is addressed to the Church, Queen and Bride:

The Gentiles will see your righteous One
and all kings your glorious One.
You will be called by a new name
chosen by the mouth of the Lord.
You will be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Could anyone describe the Church more beautifully than with the words: "a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord"?

At sunrise the Church calls out to us: "Watch zealously; the Lord our God is near at hand" (*Ben. Ant.*). The four Little Hours provide a special spiritual lift:

Prime: "The Lord almighty will come from Sion to save His people."

Terce: "Turn, O Lord, to us at last, and do not delay coming to Your servants."

Sext: "The Lord will rule from Sion; Emmanuel is His Name."

None: "The Lord our Lawgiver, the Lord our King, will Himself come to save us."

Thus the Christian can keep the spirit of Advent throughout the day with little extra effort.

At Vespers we are told to "Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her, forever" (*Magn. Ant.*).

These texts should be read slowly, prayerfully, so that the sheer joy of their message may move the soul.

3. The O-antiphons. The final step in our Christmas preparation comes with the so-called "O-antiphons," a series of seven anthems sung at the Magnificat on the last seven days before the vigil of Christmas. Nothing similar precedes any other feast. So called because of the exclamatory "O" with which they begin, these antiphons originated during the sixth and seventh centuries and were originally used with the Benedictus at Lauds. Actually they are better suited to the morning hour. Originally there were nine such typical Advent prayers. All have the same melody and structure, resembling a Roman Collect: (a) an invocation to the coming Lord expressed by the opening phrase or symbol, e.g., O Wisdom, O Root of Jesse, O Rising Dawn; (b) a brief clarification or explanation of the invocation; (c) the petition, introduced by an emphatic *veni* (come), upon which follows the plea for redemption. These sublime little songs neatly embody all that the prophets of old said of the Messiah. The melody to which they are chanted is marvellously expressive of intense desire; they are the *Rorate* of mankind.

A very definite progression of thought can be noted in these

antiphons. At first we see the Son of God in His pre-earthly existence as uncreated Wisdom who made the world and "ordered all things mightily and lovingly"; this creation of the visible universe is a symbol of the much loftier re-creation of human souls through redemption soon to be effected. The next three antiphons portray the Messiah in His Old Testament role as (a) God of the covenant and leader of the people in the desert; (b) the Root of Jesse, the descendant of David and the victorious King; and (c) the Key of David, that is, the fulfillment and conclusion of all Old Testament mysteries and types. We pray that the Redeemer may fulfill these promises in our regard. The fifth antiphon draws on nature in its use of the sun as a symbol of Christ. The text is not wholly unfamiliar, since a portion is taken from Jesus' own words. May He illumine the dark spots in our hearts. The sixth antiphon pictures the Gentiles stretching out yearning arms to the Redeemer, for He must unite Jew and Gentile into one people of God. Our petition is for the salvation of all mankind. Finally, in the seventh antiphon all our previous cries are combined in the name given to the Redeemer by the prophet — Emmanuel, i.e., God with us. Day by day we will join these various antiphons to the Magnificat in one fervent Advent prayer.

These antiphons enjoy the special distinction of being sung in full both before and after the Magnificat, an honor otherwise restricted to feasts of double rank. In monasteries the O-antiphons are chanted solemnly in choir, sometimes with added ceremony. The abbot, standing in pontifical vesture at his throne, intones the first one while the abbey bells are rung. They continue to peal throughout the singing of the Magnificat. On each following day the monk next in rank, vested in pluvial, intones the antiphon from the great lectern in the middle of the choir.

EMBER FRIDAY

Station at the Twelve Apostles

My soul magnifies the Lord

Emphasis in today's liturgy is accorded the lovely mystery of Mary's visitation, a continuation of the Gospel story begun last Wednesday. We see the holy handmaid of the Lord journey through the Judean hill country to visit Elizabeth; we hear from her lips the first Magnificat. Her visit occasions the first fruit of redemption, John's sanctification in his mother's womb. No small mysteries these.

1. Scripture Reading. No lesson from the Old Testament occurs in today's Office. From the abundance of prophetical literature let us choose Is. 55:1–13.

Ho there, all you thirsty ones,
come here for water!
If you have no money,
hurry, buy anyway and eat.
Come, buy without money and without barter,
wine and milk.
Why weigh out your money and get no bread,
your hard won earnings for that which will not satisfy?
Listen to me, and you will eat sumptuously,
your souls will feast on fatness.
Incline your ear and come to me:
hear me and your soul will live.
An everlasting covenant will I make with you,
because of my solemn promise to David.
I have made him shepherd over the peoples,
the leader and teacher of the Gentiles;
Behold, a nation you do not know you will summon,
and nations that know you not will run to you
for the sake of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel,
who will glorify you.

come, lord,
give to us your peace.
then with hearts perfected
we may joy
in your presence✚

Seek the Lord while you can find him;
and call to him while he is near.
Let the wicked desert his (sinful) way,
and the unjust man his evil desires;
and let him return to the Lord.
Then will our God show mercy on him,
for he is most ready to forgive.

The passage surely contains excellent Advent meat — gladsome promises and sobering admonition.

2. Responsories. A serious, Ember spirit can likewise be detected in the responds:

The desolate places of Israel
are sprouting sweet-smelling buds,
For, behold, our God comes with power,
surrounded by splendor.
Sion is the token of His glory.
Surely our God will visibly come.

Elizabeth's joyous exclamation greets us at dawn: "As soon as I heard the voice of your greeting, the babe in my womb leapt for joy, alleluia" (*Ben. Ant.*). If no O-antiphon occurs, the Baptist will appear for the Magnificat: "John bore witness of Him, saying: He who will come after me existed before me" (*Magn. Ant.*).

3. Holy Mass (Prope es tu). The entire Mass breathes ardent yearning for the Redeemer. But it is a yearning full of certainty. As on Sunday, the *Introit's* lead idea is "the Lord is near and all His ways are truth." The Redeemer stands at the door; what the prophets foretold is being fulfilled. The word *near* in the mystical language of the liturgy implies God's nearness in grace. The psalm verse, "Blessed are the undefiled in the way," pictures Mary journeying through the mountains; she and her divine Child are traveling the way of innocence and fidelity to God's laws. Not by the trodden paths of the world's traffic does God come to the hearts of men.

The *Oration* is another moving *Excita* (Stir up . . .) asking God to come with might and deliver mankind from evil; His grace alone can effect such change. But our confidence engenders hope. The *Lesson* from Isaias is one of the most beautiful prophecies describing the Messiah (Is. 11:1–5). We see Him as the flower from Jesse's root, as the bearer of the sevenfold Spirit of God, as the wise Judge who befriends the poor, as avenging and punishing the wicked. Thus did He once come as Man; thus does He now visit the world in His Church; thus will He come for the parousia. Psalm 84, our finest Advent song, provides texts for the *Gradual* and the *Offertory*. Yearningly we plead for the Redeemer: Please show us your Mercy incarnate; give us the Savior!

In tenderness and fervent ardor the *Gospel* has few rivals. Mary makes her way through the hill country of Judea to visit Elizabeth. Beneath her heart she bears the Savior. The house of Zachary becomes, by virtue of Mary's visit, the first church or house for God; there Christ was sheltered; there the first Magnificat was prayed; there John received the grace of redemption in his mother's womb.

Now the Sacrifice proper begins. God graciously accepts our gifts offered with prayer, and we experience His favorable response by being cleansed of sin through the mystery of the redemption (*Secr.*). The *Communion* verse, frequently during Advent a messianic prophecy, tells of Christ's final coming in great brightness with His saints; of this the Eucharist had just given a preview, and the approaching Christmas epiphany of the Lord through grace will be another. The *Postcommunion* is a genuinely Roman prayer. The holy Sacrifice (*libatio sacramenti*) must renew us, must end our unredeemed condition, must insure participation in the mystery of redemption. The words *restauret* and *vetustas* point to the liturgy's classical era, the time of Pope Leo I.

4. The Visitation. Let us deepen our appreciation of this beautiful mystery. Mary had just received the message from the angel that she was to become the Mother of the Savior. Now when

we have some great experience, we want to share it with others; for sharing halves sorrow and doubles joy. But there was no one in Nazareth with whom Mary wanted to share her secret. The angel, however, had given a suggestion. Her aged aunt, Elizabeth, would gladly impart motherly counsel. And she in turn could offer needed assistance.

Four days Mary traveled "with haste," a phrase revealing her joyful eagerness. Let us follow her through the hill country. She is traveling alone, without Joseph—and yet, not alone, for she is bearing Jesus. She is carrying the Son of God through His homeland for the first time. People pass her in silence; but nature quivers in joyous excitement and all the trees of the forest rustle *coram Domino quia venit* (Ps. 95:12). I know of two fine paintings of Mary's journey; the one by the artist Führich pictures angels going before Mary removing stones and thorns from her path. While some keep strewing flowers before her, others are singing hymns. To be sure, hosts of angels did accompany the dear Mother of God and her divine Child. As you make your way home after the *Rorate* Mass, perhaps over hills and fields, you are like the Mother of God. Within you, you are carrying Christ to others.

Now Mary arrives at Elizabeth's house. It is a memorable meeting accompanied by events of significance. The precursor greets his Lord, and simultaneously is freed from original sin. Elizabeth, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, hails Mary as the Mother of her Lord, continuing the angel's salutation: "Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb." And Mary, overwhelmed by such wonders and graces, unburdens her God-filled soul in a canticle of thanksgiving, the Magnificat. In this song she voices her gratitude for the high privilege of divine motherhood and for God's gift of a Savior to mankind. Evening after evening the Church employs her canticle at Vespers to thank God for the graces of the day. Learn to regard it as your chiefest evening prayer.

Now let us read a portion of St. Ambrose's homily on today's Gospel:

"As soon as the holy Virgin had heard the (angel's) message, she arose and journeyed through the hill country to visit her cousin. She did not go out of a spirit of skepticism over the heavenly oracle, or because of any uncertainty regarding the messenger, or because she doubted her cousin's pregnancy. She went joyfully, as one goes to fufill a vow; devoutly, as pious persons perform a duty; swiftly, for her heart was full of happiness. Whither otherwise should she hasten than to the hills and heights, now that she was full of God? God was in her womb, and her heart was sweeping her constantly upward. For the grace of the Holy Spirit knows no tardiness.

"As pious women, you too should learn from the example of God's Mother how to take tender care of a relative who is with child. Till that moment Mary had remained alone at home; but now her maidenly reserve does not keep her from the public roads; the rough mountain byways do not daunt her zealous purpose; nor the long and wearisome journey her charitable zeal. With her heart bent on loving service and giving no thought to any obstacle, our Virgin leaves her home and hastens through the hill country.

"You, maidens, follow her example; do not idle about from place to place, or loiter in the streets, or mix in public gossip. When in the public view Mary went in haste; but she tarried long, indeed for three whole months, when at the home of her cousin.

"Maidens, if you imitate Mary's modesty, imitate her humility too. Cousin goes to visit cousin, she who was young to the one advanced in years. And Mary, too, acted first, and was the first to give the greeting. For it is proper that the more chaste a virgin is, the humbler should she be. She should know how to be of service to her seniors. She who professes chastity must be the mistress of humility."

5. **Welcome Visits.** (a) In the first place, the word *visit* could well serve as a warm and homey alternate for *Advent*. A stranger, a salesman, even an enemy can "call"; but only a dear acquaintance or relative can "visit." Such a loved one is not left standing

at the door or sitting formally in a reception room; immediately he is taken into the intimacy of the home, invited to meals, accepted into the family circle. Now when God visits us, such is the kind of welcome He wants; He wishes to find Himself at home with us. For such a visit (or advent) our lives should be a preparation. Advent is God's visit, God's finding Himself at home.

Today's Gospel is an excellent instance of this very point. Mary came to Elizabeth. Outwardly it was the poor, simple Virgin who came; but with her came Christ. She knocked modestly, she greeted Elizabeth, sought her advice, sought a mother. In reality Christ was coming with great graces. He brought the sevenfold Spirit into Zachary's priestly house; He brought grace to His own precursor; He brought joy, thanksgiving, faith, love. Did Christ find a home? Indeed, a warm, a friendly home. "Whence is this to me, that the Mother of my Lord should come to me?" Here we can learn how to live out Advent in a practical way. Our whole life is advent, a visit from God.

In ordinary usage visitation connotes misfortune, an affliction to be feared and avoided. In reality visitation means blessing, for it is God who comes. If He brings the cross as His gift, it is an expression of His love. Learn to see His visitation in every circumstance of life. Always give Him a friendly, sincere welcome. When a neighbor comes to visit, it is God visiting; He is looking for and should find a home. When sorrow comes, it is God visiting, and even this should be lovingly received. Two great lessons which Advent ought teach us are to recognize God's visit in the many vicissitudes of life and to be prepared, ever ready to welcome Him.

b) Mary as a Visitor. Note how humbly she comes, full of faith and love, with haste and yet with calm recollection — a model for the Christian as he makes his way through the world and sanctifies it by bringing Christ to it and giving it His love.

Mary brings Christ to men. Evidently, this is part of God's providential plan. Many people come to the faith through Mary.

No one enters more homes and hearts than she. Even before Christ appeared visibly to men, she brought Him to them. Today too she brings Him, still invisibly, to men and sanctifies them. Many who do not yet understand Christ do understand Mary's motherly heart. Let them pray the rosary and honor Mary; she will bring Christ to them.

Mary likewise is the prototype of another woman who brings Christ to men, namely, the Church. Today's mystery of Mary's visit to Elizabeth and St. John the Baptist wonderfully parallels the Church's efforts and power to bring grace. "With haste" the Church, the holy Virgin and Mother, makes her way through a world that does not recognize the precious treasure in her womb. She turns aside from the busy thoroughfares of profane pursuits to those with quiet hearts and visits them along with God. Elizabeth represents Christians who welcome this visit with joy, who become filled with the sevenfold Spirit and thereby sanctified. Each evening in the Magnificat the Church thanks God that Christ has found a home in so many souls. She thanks Him for having willed "to fill the hungry with good things, while sending the rich empty away."

EMBER SATURDAY

Station at St. Peter's

All flesh shall see the salvation of God

It is very difficult for us to sense how important the Ember Vigil services were in the early Roman liturgy. Embertide meant covenant renewal with God, thanksgiving for the gifts of nature and grace, and conferral of Holy Orders (Ember Saturday in December was the Church's official ordination day). Finally, the December series served as the ancient Advent observance, before the four-week season was introduced.

1. **The Responsories.** We shall omit our usual "Scripture

Reading" because the Mass with its five Lessons offers more than enough food for meditation. These Lessons formed part of the ancient vigil, which consisted primarily of Bible readings.

But we ought not pass over all the responds for no time of year is as rich in chant as Advent. It seems the Church's supply is inexhaustible.

A branch will come forth from the stump of Jesse,
from his roots a sprig will sprout.
Righteousness will be the sash about His loins,
and truth the girdle round His reins.
The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon Him;
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of fortitude.

Lord, please come and do not delay;
forgive the sins of Your people
and gather together into their own land
those who are scattered abroad.
Stir up Your might, O Lord,
and come to save us.

The morning antiphon brings to mind the annunciation scene: "O angel of God, how shall this be since I know not man? Hear, O Virgin Mary: the Holy Spirit shall come upon you, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow you" (*Ben. Ant.*).

Through the day we may pray these inspiring verses:

Prime: "Behold, how glorious He is who comes to redeem the people."

Terce: "Incomparably great is His kingdom, and there will be no end of peace."

Sext: "I, the Lord, am near. I will bring My judgment; it is not far off. My salvation will soon be here."

None: "Be ready, Israel, to meet the Lord; for He is coming."

2. Holy Mass (Veni). In order to understand today's Mass we must go back to early times when the liturgy was celebrated at night in the Church of St. Peter in Rome. The two previous

Ember Day Masses had an intimate and tender character; today's reflects a universal spirit (Church of St. Peter). The Mass presents Advent in an abbreviated form; themes and topics developed during its four weeks are synthesized in today's formulary. Before us stands Christ who came as Man, who comes through grace, and who will come with power in the end of time. These three "comings" are united into one grace-laden "visitation" in the present. Several times there appears the light-and-darkness motif; for the Mass was celebrated at a very early morning hour, a circumstance that spontaneously occasioned the symbolism: from Advent's night to Christmas Light. Such is the theme of this Mass.

In the *Introit* we plead longingly for the light of Christmas grace: "Come, O Lord, and show us Your face, You who sit upon the cherubim; and we will be saved." Psalm 79 follows, which together with Psalm 18, is woven intricately into the formulary:

> Stir up Your power and come to save us.
> O Lord of hosts, lead us back again,
> let Your face shine upon us and we will be saved.
> O Lord God of hosts, how long will You burn with anger
> while Your people weep?
> How long will You feed us the bread of tears,
> and give us tears to drink in ample measure?

This psalm, we quickly recall, expressed our sentiments at the season's beginning. How well it fits the *Kyrie*, our Advent cry. The *first Oration* makes the same point in paraphrase: "Console us poor sinners with Your visitation." Christmas is truly a visitation (*adventus*) of God through grace; visitation is another way of saying "coming." The initial four *Lessons* are taken from the Book of Isaias. The first foretells how the light (Jesus) would shine in the darkness of heathendom (Egypt): "The Lord will smite the Egyptians with healing blows. They will return to God, and He will show Himself merciful to them and heal them." Already after this first lesson light glimmers through from the

rising Sun of Christmas (Psalm 18). The *second Oration* clearly expresses our present status, languishing under the old yoke of sin; but the much hoped for new birth of Christ will free us ("new birth" in the liturgical mysteries). God seems to answer our plea in the *second Lesson* with a glorious picture of the new paradise He is preparing for us:

> Wilderness and waste land will rejoice,
> the desert will be glad and blossom.
>
> Like the lily it will blossom abundantly,
> and rejoice with joy and praise.
>
> The glory of Lebanon will be given it,
> the beauty of Carmel and Sharon;
>
> They will see the glory of the Lord,
> and the beauty of our God.
>
> Strengthen hands that are weak,
> make firm the knees that totter;
>
> Say to the fainthearted: Take courage, do not fear!
> See! your God is on the way.
>
> God himself does come;
> and he will save you.
>
> Then the eyes of the blind will be opened,
> and the ears of the deaf be unstopped;
>
> Then the lame man will leap like the hart,
> and the tongue of the dumb will sing out in joy.
>
> And waters will gush forth in the desert,
> streams in the wilderness.

The *second Gradual* portrays the heavenly Bridegroom going forth from His bridal chamber eager to run His course. It is followed by an *Oration* beseeching God for the Redeemer who should replace with joy mankind's sorrow due to sin. The *third Lesson* envisions the Conqueror coming at a distance. On the heights the Church stands watching:

Scale the high mountains,
you herald of good tidings to Sion . . .
tell the cities of Judah: Behold your God!
See, the Lord God comes as a conqueror . . .
He feeds His flock like a shepherd,
He gathers together the lambs by His arm,
and lifts them to His bosom.

These splendid pictures of the Redeemer and of the kingdom of God enkindle anew our Advent desire, sentiments that call for Psalm 79 again (*third Grad.*). Christmas is not simply a passing affair; its graces should benefit us for time and eternity (*Oration*). In the *fourth Lesson* the Messiah is presented as the divine Cyrus who will lead mankind out of the Babylonian captivity of Satan. "I am the Lord, and there is no other. I formed the light and created the darkness. I bring peace and cause misfortune. . . ." In conclusion the prophet's yearning takes the form of the well-known Advent prayer (given a more direct and personal slant in the Vulgate than in the Hebrew original): "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just One; let the earth be opened and bud forth the Savior."

Once again employing Psalm 79, we voice our accord with the prophet's Advent cry: "Stir up Your might, O Lord, and come!" The *Oration* begs for the consolation of the Christmas visitation. Dawn is breaking as in the *fifth Lesson* we listen to the story of the three youths in the fiery furnace. This Lesson comes fifth on all four Ember Saturdays; in the ancient vigils it served the purpose of Lauds. To early Christians these heroic youths typified resurrection and martyrdom. Without the usual *Deo gratias* it is followed by the Canticle of the Three Youths, a "Lauds" hymn constructed on the order of a litany. The *Oration* refers back to the three youths and asks that we may overcome the flames of vice. Thus it is evident that the first four Lessons with their sequels belong to the ancient vigil; while the fifth with its canticle and Collect is a morning prayer, differing considerably from the preceding.

In the light of the preceding the Mass may be said to begin with the *Epistle*, an instruction on the parousia. The Antichrist must first come to work the mystery of iniquity, viz., the darkness which then will be vanquished by the brightness of Christ's coming. In Latin the Epistle begins and ends with the word *adventus,* which here, of course, means the coming of the Lord on the last day. It is another indication of the ancient Christian approach to Advent, one primarily oriented to the parousia. The *Tract*, taken from Psalm 79, is a *Maranatha*, a plea for the Lord's Second Coming.

The instructional part of the Mass comes to a climax with the *Gospel.* Out of a solemn and formal chronological setting steps the precursor to tell us of his mission as preparer of the way. The pericope comes to a very powerful conclusion: "All flesh shall see the salvation of God" — i.e., soon we will see the Savior. Thus the Foremass takes us to the very threshold of Christmas. The choice of Gospel is another instance of the liturgy's ingenuity. With it the drama of the Foremass ends, only to have its message turn into reality in the Sacrifice proper. Darkness vanishes as the light of divine grace appears with the Redeemer's visitation. Christmas is already here (*Off.*):

> Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion;
> shout for joy, O daughter of Jerusalem!
> See, your King is coming to you,
> the Holy One, the Savior.
> Peace is His message to the Gentiles,
> and His authority extends from sea to sea.
> Yes, I am coming to dwell in your midst, says the Lord.

Champion-like the divine Sun rejoices to run the course of redemption. Sunday's Sun and the Sun of Christmas has arisen (*Comm.*). The *Postcommunion* gives expression to the significant fact that "the (Christmas) mysteries" were instituted as the certain guarantee of our spiritual rebirth.

These three Ember Day Masses were introduced about the time of Leo I before the Advent season, as we know it, became

fixed. They bear witness to the amazing creative genius of the liturgy in the fourth and fifth centuries, a genius never since attained.

3. The Holy Way of Christ. It is not an easy task to arrange the manifold texts and ideas of the Ember Day Masses under a single unifying theme. The many little stones of a large mosaic form a picture only after each has been put in its proper place. But every work of art must have a unifying principle. For the formularies under consideration I might suggest "Christ on His Way through the World." Christ is traveling through time, through hearts. He does not travel alone on His most unique journey; heaven, earth, and hell provide company.

Let us look closer and study its component features: Christ, the Way, His escorts, and persons met. (a) How does Christ start His journey? "Like a bridegroom out of his chamber He rejoices as He hurries on His course. His going forth is from one end of the heavens, and His circuit unto the other." See, the divine Hero, youthful and brave, rejoicing in the love of life, the Bridegroom. The second Lesson continues the theme: "Behold, the Lord God will come as a conqueror; His hand will rule . . . His booty precedes Him. The King and Conqueror proceeds on His holy course. But He also bears the features of a peacemaker: "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd and carry His lambs in His arms. . . ."

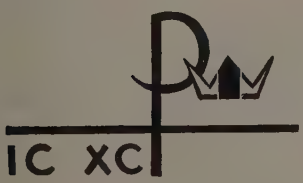
b) His holy course leads through the world, through the land of the Gentiles as symbolized by Egypt (*first Lesson*). The path leads through the desert, which will again become a fruitful garden (*second Lesson*). "And a path and a way will be there; it will be called the holy way, the unclean will not pass over it." This holy path is best described in the verses immediately following the second Lesson (Is. 35:8ff.). He will transform the world into a place of healing in which the blind and the deaf and the lame will be cured.

c) Who accompanies the King? Besides the angels and saints, there is one who prepares the way and one who blocks the way. The Gospel describes the one who prepares the way. He is John,

the foreman over the millions now working on the highway on which Christ will come at Christmas. But the Epistle reveals another character, the sinister, malevolent antagonist, Antichrist. He is not an historical personage; in every age he assumes a different form. Once it was Nero, today —. He is the bridge-wrecker, the barricade-builder.

d) The persons met along the way may be divided into three categories — the indifferent, the hostile, and the responsive. Most of those whom Christ meets prove indifferent. The hostile clench their fists. But there is one, a woman of youthful beauty, yet bearing in her features the marks of suffering, for she has passed through the furnace of affliction (*fifth Lesson*). She gathers her children together and goes with joy to meet Christ: "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above. . . ." She chants a song of praise: "Blessed are You who walk on the wings of the wind, and on the waves of the sea; You are worthy to be praised and glorified forever." She is holy Mother Church.

Now because the message of the Foremass assumes objective reality as the action continues, there arises from our hearts the jubilant Offertory cry: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Sion; for behold, your King now comes to you."



THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

Now all is fulfilled

No new avenues remain to be explored in our preparation for Christmas during this fourth week of Advent, for the Church already has unfolded her entire Advent message. She has led us to the threshold of Christmas with the joyous cry, "Rejoice, for the Lord is near!", and more especially by the Ember Day observance. The liturgy has defined the picture of Christ the Savior as clearly as it can for the time. On this last Sunday, therefore, all the themes of Advent are re-echoed in one harmonious strain by our three Advent preachers. (This last week is usually cut short by the occurrence of Christmas and its succession of feasts.)

The Sunday Office begins with Vespers on Saturday. The antiphons convey our expectancy and intense desire for the Redeemer. The watchman in his tower gives the signal for the King's arrival: "Blow the trumpet in Sion, for the day of the Lord is near! Behold, He comes to save us, alleluia, alleluia." Eagerly we inquire, who is this King? "Behold, He is coming whom all nations desire; and the house of the Lord will be filled with glory, alleluia." What will happen when He comes? "The crooked will be made straight, and the rough places even. Come, Lord, and delay no longer, alleluia."

Already the procession which is to meet Him is forming: "The Lord is coming! Go out to meet Him and say: Now we have the great beginning, and Your kingdom will never end. You are the mighty God, the Ruler, the Prince of Peace, alleluia, alleluia." So far the direct object of our expectancy was the Redeemer's coming; now we lift our eyes to heaven and say: "Your almighty Word, Lord, will leap down out of your royal throne, alleluia." The *Chapter* with its concern over priestly duties recalls the ordinations of Ember Saturday.

THE FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

Station at the Twelve Apostles

All flesh will see the salvation of God

1. **Scripture Reading (Is. 35:1–10).** In terms of paradise idealized, the prophet tells us of the messianic kingdom. He describes the Messiah as a Savior and a Physician who will heal the blind, the deaf, the dumb, and the lame. The actual message is not difficult to grasp.

Thus says the Lord:
Wilderness and waste land will rejoice,
the desert will be glad and blossom.
Like the lily it will blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and praise.
The glory of Lebanon will be given it,
the beauty of Carmel and Sharon.
They will see the glory of the Lord,
the beauty of our God.
Strengthen the hands that are weak,
make firm the knees that totter.
Say to the fainthearted: Take courage, do not fear!
See, your God is on the way.
God himself will come;
and he will save you.
Then will the eyes of the blind be opened,
and the ears of the deaf be unstopped;
Then will the lame man leap like a deer,
and the tongues of the dumb will sing out in joy.
Waters will gush forth in the desert,
streams in the wilderness.
The parched ground will become a pool,
and thirsty land springs of water.
There will be a highway there,
and it will be called: Holiness Highway.
The unclean will not walk upon it,
nor sinners wander over it.

No lions will be there,
nor will any wild beast trod thereon.
Only the redeemed will walk there.
Those redeemed by the Lord will return home
journeying to Sion with songs,
with joy eternal upon their heads.
Joy and gladness will be found there;
sorrow and lamentation will flee.

Thank the Holy Spirit for giving us these Advent messages.

2. The Responsories. Again, the Divine Office offers a series of splendid responsories.

Behold, the fullness of time has come!
Now God sends forth His Son into the world,
born of a Virgin, subject to the Law —
to redeem those under the Law.
Because of the infinite love with which God loved us
He sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.

A Child will be born to us,
and His Name will be called: The Mighty God.
He will sit upon the throne of His father David and govern;
for authority will rest upon His shoulder.
In Him all the peoples of the earth will be blessed;
all nations will serve Him.

As the Angelus bell peals at sunrise we pray: "Hail, Mary, full of grace; the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, alleluia."

3. Holy Mass (Rorate caeli). Formerly this Sunday was aliturgical because the Ember Day ceremonies lasted well into Sunday morning. Later, when its liturgy was transferred to Saturday morning, another formulary was composed from the texts of the Ember Day Masses. Accordingly, the Introit, Gradual, and Communion are as on Wednesday and the Gospel as on Saturday.

Thus today's Mass serves as a belated Ember Day observance for those of the faithful who for some reason could not participate during the week; or we may regard it as a kind of Ember Day observance for the whole assembled community — a grateful review of the past three months and a covenant renewal for the coming quarter. The *Epistle* reverts to the ordinations of the day before, the principal and only official day for this function in the early Church. Think of the many bishops and priests who received Holy Orders yesterday. Let us thank God for calling them and pray that their numbers may be increased.

The present Mass text covers all of Advent. Once more we hear from the lips of our three Advent preachers words which have been ringing in our ears for three weeks. From Isaias: "Drop down dew . . ."; from John the Baptist: "Prepare the way"; from the Blessed Virgin: "Hail, Mary." The prophet stands at the threshold (*Intr.*), his rightful place since he belongs to the Old Testament. He repeats his immortal Advent cry (and ours too): "Let the earth open and bud forth the Savior."

Upon entering the house of God we meet the second preacher, John the Baptist. He precedes the Lord and leads the Bridegroom (Christ) to His bride (the Church). His is the voice crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord." He is the dominant figure in the Gospel, a position suited to him because his

exhortations to repentance pinpoint our greatest moral task during Advent.

Finally, as the *Offertory* begins, Mary leads us to the altar, for her position is rightly in the Holy of Holies. Isaias, in his role as prophet, stood outside the closed doors; the Baptist, as the preacher of repentance, is given a position in the pulpit during the Foremass; but Mary exemplifies grace, and therefore she leads us to the altar, the altar upon which the Redeemer will descend as He did into her virginal womb. This is the topmost rung in our anticipation of the Christmas mystery. Isaias enkindles within us longing for the Redeemer; John prepares His way into our hearts; while Mary signifies to us His coming in grace. Through the Eucharistic Sacrifice the Church and the soul become like the Mother of God, true Christ-bearers. For us Christmas must mean bringing Christ to the world.

These three figures reveal the most profound message of the liturgy in Mass and Office. In the night Office of Matins Isaias voices expectancy and desire; in the Foremass John preaches the Word of God; and Mary brings grace in the Sacrifice proper.

4. The Advent Triad. During the first three weeks of Advent we noticed a beautiful progression of motifs and moods: desire, preparation, and joy. The picture of Christ was revealed to us with increasing clarity and vividness, from the Child in Bethlehem to the Lord at His final coming. We were instructed by Isaias, John the Baptist, and Mary until the fourth Sunday when the messages of all three fell together in splendid harmony.

In our previous considerations we substituted the idea of the kingdom of God for that of the Redeemer. Now let us see how these three Advent messengers help our high purpose, how they instil the season's sentiments in our hearts. (a) Isaias. His longing cry, "Drop down dew, ye heavens . . .," must become our own. Before God comes to us, He demands preparation. He will not force His gifts upon us. We must desire them, we must be spiritually hungry. Advent desire means that we must cultivate a fruitful soil for the seed of grace, that we become receptive to God's kingdom. In Christ's own words, "Thy kingdom *come*."

This desire and longing for God's kingdom should be sustained throughout life, nourished like a holy light and never permitted to be extinguished. We may fail, we may go astray, or we may be infatuated with earthly things, but if a glimmer of this light remains, we will find our way out of the labyrinth. Only he is lost who chokes out this light completely. Advent's great task, therefore, is to re-enkindle desire, our hope in the kingdom of God.

b) John the Baptist. His message, "Prepare the way of the Lord," means the same thing as Christ's exhortation to "do penance," viz., change your outlook. The gravitational center of life must not be the earthly or the ego, but God. God demands a reordering of our lives based on His will. St. Paul tells us that there are two laws within us, the law of the spirit and the law of the flesh. It is according to the law of the spirit that we must order our lives. The kingdom of God cannot come to us unless we continually reform our life according to the teachings of Christ. Advent is the time for such reformation.

c) Mary. Desire and reformation of life are human factors; God's advent through grace is intrinsically divine. Here Mary is the sublime model. She desired the kingdom of God and based her life on the words: "I am the handmaid of the Lord." Then came the great moment when God made her His dwelling place. She hears the greeting, "Hail, full of grace. . . ." With open heart she receives God; her soul becomes His kingdom in all its fullness. Again she knows of nothing to say but "I am the handmaid of the Lord." This brought Christmas to her heart.

Her example must be our perpetual goal on earth. We must ever be ready and willing to receive the kingdom of God within ourselves as opportunities present themselves. Baptism was our first Christmas, and every Eucharistic Sacrifice is Christmas repeated. The feasts of the Church's liturgical year are days of grace, days of the kingdom of God. Maintain a calm, reverent, and recollected attitude so as not to disturb God's holy stirrings within you.

Thus let us approach Christmas spiritually.

MONDAY IN THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

Your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel

1. Scripture Reading. Isaias describes the glory of the new Sion (Is. 54:1–14):

Give praise, O barren one, you who never had a child;
break forth in song, rejoice, you who never were in travail;
for many are the children of the desolate,
more than of her who has a husband, says the Lord.
Enlarge your tent's dimensions,
stretch out the skins of your dwelling, farther, farther.
Lengthen your guys,
set fast your stakes . . . .
Fear not; you need not be ashamed;
take courage, you need not blush.
You will forget the shame of your sterility,
you will not remember the reproach of widowhood.
For he who made you will be your spouse;
His name: the Lord of Hosts.
Your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel;
he is called the God of all the earth.
For like a woman, forsaken and brokenhearted,
the Lord has called you back again;
like a woman loved in youth, but then cast off.
Your God says:
Only a little while did I forsake you;
now with greatest love do I embrace you anew.
In a moment of anger I hid my face from you a while;
but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on you.
Thus says the Lord, your redeemer:
I shall do as in the days of Noe.
As I swore at that time never more to deluge the earth with water —

so do I swear now not to be angry with you
or to chastise you further.
The mountains may quake, and the hills may tremble;
but my mercy will not leave you,
my covenant of peace will not be shaken,
says the Lord, who pities you.
O poor one, tossed by the tempest, disconsolate,
see, I will set your stones in garnet,
and lay your foundations with sapphires.
I will make your bulwarks of jasper, your gates of
crystal,
and all your borders of precious stones.
All your sons will be children of God,
and to them I will give the fullness of peace.

2. The Responsories. In spirit we already see the Savior ruling and baptizing.

The sceptre will not vanish from Judah,
nor sovereignty from his tribe,
until He comes whom (God) will send —
for whom the Gentiles long.
More beautiful than dark wine are His eyes,
His teeth more white than milk.

The Baptist heralds the rising of the divine Sun, before which the moon (himself and the Old Testament) must pale:

I must decrease, He must increase.
He it is who, coming after me, existed before me;
the lace of His shoe I am not worthy to loose.
I baptize you with water; but He will baptize you
with the Holy Spirit.

At sunrise we hear John's voice calling: "Thus says the Lord: Set your heart aright, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand, alleluia" (*Ben. Ant.*).

Our thoughts today revolve around the figures of the Bride-

groom Christ and His bride (the soul and the Church). How tenderly Isaias developed the theme. Try to apply it personally.

3. **The Christmas Tree.** It is indeed a wonderful custom to give presents to children at Christmas with the reminder that it is the Christ-Child who is responsible. This practice, a masterpiece of popular piety, has brought much true joy to the world. For weeks the children speak and think of nothing but the coming of the Christ-Child with His gifts. Anyone who has been raised in a happy family knows how Christmas is the family feast par excellence. All the love, the devotion, and the self-denial which we ordinarily withhold burst forth around the Christmas tree. How lovely the surprises prepared for each other. Small children in the home make the joy doubly great. Enemies of our faith seek in vain for a substitute for our Christian custom; while even pagans try to copy it.

But we must ever remain mindful of its deeper significance. Why Christmas presents and Christmas trees, after all? Because these symbolize what we as Christians celebrate at Christmas, that is, the momentous fact that a Savior, a Deliverer, a Redeemer has come upon this poor earth to make us happy. That is the import of the feast. And therefore do we celebrate His coming into the world, His birth at Bethlehem. Christmas commemorates redemption.

In the texts of the liturgy the Church sings again and again: "Today true Peace has come down to us from heaven." The Church foresees the entire work of redemption accomplished in the birth of Christ. In Christ we have received every good, in Him we have received God's greatest gift. Everything our faith holds as worthy of desire we obtain in Christ — divine adoption, the Church, the Eucharist, heaven . . . It is as though Mother Church wishes to pour out anew at Christmas the fullness of her grace-treasures. Shouldn't these reflections help in understanding the symbolism of the Christmas tree? Yes, shower your gifts, your joy, your kindness, and your love upon all, for these are symbols of Christ, the greatest Gift heaven itself could send us. And since Christ Himself is true Love and Joy and Peace, each

of us wishes to be a Christ-Child himself. Hence, the gifts we get from others come from the Christ-Child.

Is there a more heartening picture than that of the lighted Christmas tree surrounded with gifts and the radiant eyes of children? It is a symbol of the Christian religion from which we receive all light, all happiness and joy. Could we but grasp that truth. Learn it from the children. Christ said: "Unless you become as little children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." We must be like children in their impatient longing for Christmas, in their joy immeasurable. If there is a child in your midst, watch it during these days. Notice its behavior and make it the model of your longing for Christ, of your joy in Christ.

TUESDAY IN THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

A Child is born to us

1. Scripture Reading. At Matins tonight the prophet Isaias describes the Messiah's work. It is a passage Christ hallowed by applying it to Himself (Is. 61:1–8).

The spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me.
He has sent me to bring good tidings to the meek,
to heal broken hearts,
to preach release to prisoners,
and redemption to those in bonds;
to proclaim a year of grace in the Lord,
a day of rest from our God;
to comfort all who weep;
to give the mourners of Sion a crown in place of ashes,
the oil of joy in place of mourning garments,
and a festal robe in place of a grief-stricken heart.

The Church says:

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
and my heart will exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
with the robe of justice he has covered me —
as a bridegroom arrayed in his crown,
as a bride adorned with her jewels.

Unmistakably we sense the nearness of Christmas from this passage.

2. **The Responsories** hardly restrain Christmas joy.

A Child will be born to us,
and His Name will be called: The Mighty God.
He will sit upon the throne of His father David and govern;
for authority will rest upon His shoulder.
In Him all the peoples of the earth will be blessed;
all nations will serve Him.

O virgin Israel, return home to your cities.
How long will you go about sorrowing?
You will bring forth the Lord your Savior,
a new offering for the earth.
Men will walk in the paths of salvation.
I have loved you with an everlasting love —
therefore, I have drawn you to myself, taking pity on you.

At sunrise we cry to God: "Arise, arise, put on strength, O arm of the Lord" (*Ben. Ant.*).

3. **A Meditation.** Not much time remains until Christmas. Already the Church is counting the days, as she does only at Easter. Although the entire season of Advent was a preparation, let us make sure we are now ready for Christmas. (a) *Spiritual housecleaning.* Just as we ordinarily give the house a thorough cleaning before Christmas, so also should we cleanse our soul.

In the days when the sacraments were received less frequently, it was customary to go to Confession before great feasts. If ever the practice of devout Confession is recommended, it is before the great feasts. Point number one, then, calls for a thorough spiritual cleansing.

b) The *Imitation of Christ* puts it very beautifully: "With the recurrence of the principal feasts our practices of virtue should take on new life . . . At each feast we should so make our good resolutions as if we would no longer celebrate the next one on earth but in heaven, keeping the one, eternal festival with all the friends of God . . . then if God should extend the number of our days on earth, we ought feel ourselves not yet sufficiently adorned for the feast, not yet worthy to share in the tremendous glory to be revealed in us at the appointed time; therefore the remaining days must be used to prepare still more for our journey home" (Bk. I, ch. 19).

c) Anyone who has gone swimming in the ocean knows what a great pleasure it is to see the big waves approaching and then to be borne aloft by them. We who live in the Church live in an ocean of grace; wave after wave of grace comes in upon us. During the course of the liturgical year we witness two unusually great surges of grace — Christmas and Easter. Between these there is a valley, the time of preparation (Advent and Lent) when we are cast to the depths; but then comes the rising wave to bear us aloft, the feast. May we be borne high by the incoming waves of Christmas grace.

WEDNESDAY IN THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

See, the Savior is already on the way

1. Scripture Reading. During these last few days the prophetical promises have become more clear and joyful. Again today

let us cull out one of Isaias' many glowing pictures of Jerusalem as God's bride (Is. 62).

For Sion's sake I will not hold my peace,
and for the sake of Jerusalem I will not rest
till her just One comes forth as brightness,
and her savior as a burning torch.
Then will the Gentiles see your just One,
and all kings your glorious One.
They will call him by a new name,
spoken by the mouth of the Lord himself.
And you will be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
No longer will you be called: 'Forsaken,'
your land 'Desolate.'
Rather, you will be called: 'The Bride of God,'
and your land: 'Flourishing with People.'
For the Lord is well pleased with you,
and your land will be filled with people.
As a young man is pleased with his virgin,
so your Maker is pleased with you.
And as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride,
so your God rejoices over you.
Upon your walls, Jerusalem,
I am placing watchmen;
all the day and all the night they will never be silent:
You who remind God, do not keep silent,
give him no peace till he establish Jerusalem,
till he make it for praise upon the earth.
Leave, leave through the gates,
and prepare the way for the people.

This fine passage forms a fitting transition from Advent to Christmas.

2. The Responsories. The certainty of the Lord's coming

grows continally stronger. God makes His pledge in terms of the oath after the deluge:

> I have sworn it, says the Lord,
> I will not be angry against the earth anymore.
> The mountains and hills will receive My righteousness,
> there will be a covenant of peace in Jerusalem.
> My salvation is near, it will surely come,
> and My righteousness will be revealed.

At sunrise the Redeemer Himself proclaims: "I will place salvation in Sion, and My glory in Jerusalem, alleluia" (*Ben. Ant.*).

Again the liturgy has portrayed mankind, the Church, the soul, as once rejected because of sin, but now through redemption received back as a bride.

THURSDAY IN THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

O that you would rend the heavens

1. Scripture Reading. The prophet provides a fervent Advent prayer: (Is. 64:1–11):

> O that you would rend the heavens and come down!
> Then would the mountains melt at your presence . . .
> O, if only you would come doing wonders we never imagined,
> if only you would descend so that all that is high and haughty might perish.
> From the beginning of the world it has never been heard,
> nor has any ear perceived,
> neither has any eye seen, apart from yours, O God,
> what wonders you have prepared for them who await you.

2. For the last time let us reflect upon the Responsory derived from Jacob's oracle over Judah:

> The sceptre will not vanish from Judah,
> nor sovereignty from his tribe,
> until He comes whom (God) will send —
> for whom the Gentiles long.
> More beautiful than dark wine are His eyes,
> His teeth more white than milk.

The fulfillment of the prophecy is imminent; already we are told to

> Blow the trumpet in Sion!
> Call the nations, and tell all people:
> Behold, God, our Savior, is coming.
> Proclaim it, noise it abroad,
> tell it, tell it loudly:
> Behold, God, our Savior, is coming.

At dawn Mother Church comforts us: "Be comforted, be comforted, My people, says the Lord your God" (*Ben. Ant.*). "The Lord our Lawgiver, the Lord our King, He Himself will come to redeem us" (*Ant. at Lauds*).

FRIDAY IN THE FOURTH WEEK OF ADVENT

Rejoice with Jerusalem

1. **Scripture Reading.** Our last Advent reading will be taken from the final chapter of the Book of Isaias (Is. 66:10ff.):

> Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you who love her;
> shout for joy with her, all you who mourn for her;
> be filled at her consoling breasts,
> nurse with delight from the abundance of her glory.

For thus says the Lord:
Indeed I will extend peace to her like a river,
like a flowing stream the glory of the nations.
You shall drink thereof,
you shall be carried on the hip, and dandled in her lap.
As an infant fondled by its mother,
so will I fondle you;
yes, you shall be comforted in Jerusalem.
When you see this, your heart will rejoice,
and your bones will flourish like an herb.
And the hand of the Lord will be known towards his servants,
but his indignation towards enemies.
For behold, the Lord will come as with fire,
and his chariots like a whirlwind . . . .

2. The Responsories.

Behold, the fullness of time has come!
Now God sends forth His Son into the world,
born of a virgin, subject to the Law —
to redeem those under the Law.
Because of the infinite love with which God loved us,
He sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh.

A Child will be born to us,
and His Name will be called: The Mighty God.
He will sit upon the throne of His Father David and govern;
for authority will rest upon His shoulder.
In Him all the peoples of the earth will be blessed;
all nations will serve Him.

"God will come from Lebanon, and His brightness will equal the sun."

"I am looking expectantly for the Lord, I am eagerly awaiting God my Savior" (*Ant. at Lauds*).

FEASTS OF SAINTS DURING ADVENT

The Church has placed fewer feasts of saints into seasons of greater liturgical importance such as Advent and Lent, and rightly so, because the feasts of saints are no essential part of the Church year. In Advent, for example, our whole attention is directed to the coming of the King; hence it is proper that servants remain in the background. Of course, this principle was not always strictly adhered to in the past, and the feasts of saints gradually increased even in these seasons. Our devotion to the liturgy will indeed move us to celebrate the feasts of saints which the Church puts in Advent, yet with somewhat less emphasis; or we can utilize their cultus to better our own Advent preparation, seeing them as heralds of the Messiah. We will try to bridge the gap by making the saints serve Advent. At times this will be quite easy, e.g., with St. Lucy, whose very name, "the light-giver," expresses the primary Christmas theme. Even in popular thought several saints are regarded as precursors of Christmas, e.g., the gift-bearer, St. Nicholas. And how well the feast of the Immaculate Conception fits into the Advent season needs no elaboration.

November 29

ST. SATURNINUS, Martyr

God is wonderful in His saints

St. Saturninus. *Day of death*: November 29, about 300. *Grave*: at first in the cemetery of Thrason on the Via Salaria, then on the Coelian Hill. *Life.* The Martyrology gives these details: "At Rome on the Via Salaria the death of the holy martyr, the aged Saturninus, and of the deacon Sisinius. Under the emperor Maximianus they suffered long in prison. The prefect of Rome ordered them placed on the rack till their joints were torn loose, then beaten with knotted whips, and burnt with torches; at last removed from the rack, they were beheaded." According to the inscription on his tomb by Pope St. Damasus, Saturninus hailed from Carthage. The Acts of Marcellus say he was condemned as a frail old man to carry sand for the construction of the Baths of Diocletian; but when by his patience and prayer and encouragement he led many to the faith, he was beheaded. *Application.* "God is wonderful in His saints" — so the Church exclaims when contemplating the heroism of her martyrs. Yes, the virtues of the saints are a reflection of God's greatness and beauty. If the splendor of nature moves us to admiration of God, how much more the virtues of His chosen ones.

November 30

ST. ANDREW, Apostle

Hail, precious Cross, receive a disciple!

The first apostle-feast of the new Church year! Feasts of the apostles are "redemption feasts"; they are distributed throughout the liturgical year and are like the mighty rocks that give foundation to an edifice. "You are fellow-citizens with the saints, members of God's household; you are built upon the foundation

of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone" (Vesp.). It would be good liturgical procedure to place greater stress upon the celebration of the feasts of the apostles; these days once were holydays of obligation. In some churches there is the custom of lighting "twelve apostle candles" during the divine services. At the present time we are looking forward to the Lord's coming (frequently Advent has already begun), and with Andrew we want to embrace His Cross in holy love. The whole of the redemptive program is involved, and these fruits we need and receive in Advent too.

1. St. Andrew. *Day of death*: November 30 (year unknown). *Grave*: at first in Patras; on March 3, 357, his relics were transferred to Constantinople; since 1208 the apostle's burial church is at Amalfi, his head in St. Peter's. *Picture*: with an oblique cross, known as St. Andrew's cross. *Life*. Andrew, Peter's brother, and John were the first disciples to follow the Lord. With tender delicacy the Gospel (John 1:35–42) describes their first meeting with Jesus. Andrew did not belong to the inner circle of the apostles, Peter, James and John, and the evangelists narrate nothing extraordinary about him (John 6:8); but tradition (resting on apocryphal Acts) extols his great love of the Cross and of the Savior; and the Church distinguishes him both in the Mass (his name occurs in the Canon and in the *Libera* since the time of Pope St. Gregory I who had a special devotion to him) and in the Breviary.

The story of his martyrdom rests on the apocryphal Acts which lack historical foundation. The pagan judge exhorted him to sacrifice to the gods. Andrew replied: "I sacrifice daily to almighty God, the one and true God. Not the flesh of oxen and the blood of goats do I offer, but the unspotted Lamb upon the altar. All the faithful partake of His flesh, yet the Lamb remains unharmed and living." Angered by the reply, Aegeas commanded him to be thrown into prison. With little difficulty the people would have freed him, but Andrew personally calmed the mob and earnestly entreated them to desist, as he was hastening toward an ardently desired crown of martyrdom.

When Andrew was led to the place of martyrdom, on beholding the cross from a distance he cried out: "O good Cross, so long desired and now set up for my longing soul! Confident and rejoicing I come to you; exultingly receive me, a disciple of Him who hung on you." Forthwith he was nailed to the cross. For two days he hung there alive, unceasingly proclaiming the doctrine of Christ until he passed on to Him whose likeness in death he had so vehemently desired. — The legendary account of our saint's martyrdom has this value: it presents to us the mysticism of the Cross of later times. May Andrew, apostle and teacher of the Church, bestow on us the grace to see and imitate the Crucified in whatever crosses we encounter.

2. Divine Office. Many of the antiphons and responsories employ material found in the apocryphal Acts. The Cross is the ever recurring theme.

"Hail, beloved Cross, consecrated by the body of Christ,
adorned by His members as with precious gems!"

"Blessed Andrew prayed saying: O Lord, King of eternal glory,
accept me hanging on the cross."

"Maximilla, the beloved of Christ, took away the body of the
apostle and with spices gave it an honorable burial."

While the Divine Office is of later origin and rests on the apocryphal Acts, the Mass text follows ancient classic form.

3. Holy Mass (Mihi autem). Central in the formulary stands the second and final call of the apostle at Lake Gennesareth (*Gospel*); this too marks the action of the mystery, as the *Communion* so beautifully proves: "Follow Me!" The Lord is inviting us, and we leave all and follow Him to His sacred banquet. "I will make you fishers of men." Jesus' word applies first of all to ordained priests, as they are the divinely commissioned fishers of the *pisciculi,* the little fishes in the Church's net; they are the preachers of the faith. With this in mind the *Epistle* becomes easier to interpret; faith is necessary for all, whether Jew or

Gentile; but faith presupposes divinely sent messengers to declare it. Of these the apostle Andrew was one of the most illustrious.

The other parts of the Mass are taken from the Common. In the *Introit* and the *Offertory* we praise the apostles as friends of Christ and princes over God's kingdom; in the *Gradual* as the princely sons of the Queen, the Church. — If you are not ordained, it would certainly be in harmony with liturgical spirit to apply the Lord's words to yourself; lay persons too must be "fishers of men" — by example, by charity, by the fulfillment of duties and by speech!

When a day is passed over with no saint listed, the implication is not that the day lacks its saints but simply that none is officially listed on the calendar followed by the Roman Missal and Breviary.

December 2

ST. BIBIANA, Virgin and Martyr

A family of martyrs

1. St. Bibiana. *Day of death*: December 2, year uncertain. *Grave*: her basilica on the Esquiline in Rome was constructed during the pontificate of Pope Simplicius (468–473); when alterations in the structure were made by Bernini under Urban VIII in 1625, the body of the saint was found; her relics and those of her whole family now lie under the high altar. *Picture*: there is a statue of the saint in her Roman basilica, one of Bernini's best; and frescoes throughout the church portray her life and death. *Life.* An unauthenticated legend tells us that the saint belonged to a family of martyrs; father, mother, and a sister died for the faith. Bibiana was consigned to Rufina, a woman of ill fame, to be perverted; but she, reared from the cradle in the Christian law, kept the bloom of her innocence unstained, proved stronger than her temptress, and defeated all her schemes.

After she had ridiculed the trickery of the judge, he ordered her, hands bound, tied to a pillar and beaten with leaded whips till she expired. Her holy body, thrown to the dogs, lay two days in the market place but with heavenly protection remained intact. Bibiana is honored as patroness of Seville (Spain); she is invoked against diseases of the head and epilepsy. *Application.* Gravely tempted, God's aid preserved Bibiana inviolate. Now she is honored as the noblest and most courageous in a family of martyrs. In our day, too, the Church needs families noted for the spirit of sacrifice and martyrdom. — The feast of St. Bibiana was introduced into the Church's calendar only in the seventeenth century under Urban VIII.

2. Holy Mass (Me expectaverunt). In the holy Sacrifice the saint is intermediary between Christ and ourselves; she draws us into His Sacrifice. Together with Bibiana we carry our life and our sufferings as an Offertory oblation to the altar. Christ, Bibiana, myself — all three die in the holy Sacrifice. In the sacrificial banquet we partake in a certain measure of Bibiana's strength of faith and crown of glory.

Now take the Mass text and apply it personally; hear the martyr pray amid her suffering: "The wicked have waited for me . . . but I keep Your testimonies in my heart" (*Intr.*). By her life she exemplified these words (Rufina); will they also be exemplified in my conduct today? For what I say in the Introit refers likewise to me. The *Lesson* is our saint's thanksgiving prayer in martyrdom. Likewise expressive of our saint's life is Psalm 45 (*Grad.*): God in her soul does not falter; the "surging waves" of her suffering only "make the City of God joyful; the Most High is sanctifying His tabernacle." She remained unharmed amid the inrushing flood of suffering. Bibiana found the precious "treasure," the "pearl of great price," God's kingdom; for it she surrendered all earthly happiness, comforts, wealth, her very life (*Gosp.*). Am I willing to make the same sacrificial oblation?

December 3

ST. FRANCIS XAVIER, Confessor

Francis Xavier — Advent preacher to many pagans

It is easy to pinpoint the relation of today's saint to Advent. Francis Xavier was Christ's *precursor* to India and Japan. In the Far East the great missionary prepared the way of the Lord like another John the Baptist.

1. St. Francis Xavier. *Day of death*: December 2, 1552, canonized 1622. *Grave*: since 1554 his body rests in Goa (India); in 1614 the right arm was brought to the Gesù church in Rome. *Life*. The great missionary was born in 1506 at Navarre. In 1525 he went to study at Paris, joined St. Ignatius and his company in 1525, was sent to India in 1542, and labored in Japan from 1549 to 1551. Region after region he traversed, always on foot and often shoeless. Japan and six other kingdoms owe the beginnings of faith to him. Hundreds of thousands he brought to Christ in India alone; mighty princes, and kings too, he immersed in the redeeming waters of baptism.

In spite of accomplishing such great works for God, out of humility he habitually wrote to his superior, St. Ignatius, on his knees. His fiery zeal in the spread of the Gospel was divinely confirmed by innumerable miracles. Several dead he raised to life, one of whom had been buried the previous day. His one passion was to gain souls for heaven. "Give me souls, O God!" was his constant prayer. *Application*. St. Francis Xavier blazed the way for the mission movement in modern times — hence his title of patron of the missions. Christ's commission to spread the Gospel also applies to me. Today I will pray for all missionaries and lay aside a contribution according to my means for their support.

2. Holy Mass (Loquebar). The whole formulary is devoted to the theme: world mission. In the *Introit* the converted nations are urged to thank God for His mercy and truth, viz., the grace of conversion; also we see our saint standing before kings con-

fessing Christ (the Introit departs from ancient tradition by taking portions from two different psalms). The thought-provoking *Epistle* brings out the importance of the missionary; without a commissioned preacher men cannot receive the faith. In developing his argument Paul accommodates a splendid passage from Isaias: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, of those who bring glad tidings of good things." In Francis Xavier the words of Psalm 18 received an unexpected fulfillment: "Their sound has gone forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world."

In the *Gospel* Christ gives His mission command, and with it the power of working miracles, a charism so marvelously manifested in the life of today's saint. The *Communion* verse, "Blessed is the servant whom the Lord finds alert when He comes. Amen, I say to you, He will give him charge over all His goods," which was so wonderfully verified in the case of Francis Xavier, also holds for us now in the sacrificial banquet. And, moreover, in Advent the text has a peculiar, eschatological tone. In his day Francis brought divine life to many; should he not eagerly assist us in increasing this life as we celebrate the holy Sacrifice in his honor?

December 4

ST. PETER CHRYSOLOGUS, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

ST. BARBARA, Virgin and Martyr

Doctors of the Church herald the coming King

1. **St. Peter Chrysologus.** *Day of death*: December 2, about 450. *Grave*: at Imola, the place where he was born and died (Province of Bologna); one arm is preserved in his episcopal see of Ravenna. His feast, celebrated for centuries at Ravenna, was in 1729 extended to the universal Church. *Life*. The wonder-

ful way by which our saint became bishop of Ravenna in 433 is referred to in the Collect (due to a vision had by the Pope). Because of his brilliant oratory he received the surname *Chrysologus,* the Golden-worded. When addressing the people he spoke so forcefully and fervently that his voice often failed him. On one such occasion the Ravenna audience was so deeply moved as to fill out the pause with many tears and with prayers both loud and silent; afterwards the bishop thanked the Lord for turning a default of speech to the good of souls and the increase of charity.

Familiar also is his dictum: "If you jest with the devil, you cannot rejoice with Christ." Some of his sermons are read in the Breviary. Ravenna, his episcopal city, still harbors treasures of ancient Christian liturgical art dating to his day. *Application.* Liturgical living necessarily includes a loving willingness to read and to listen to homilies and sermons. In this the contemporaries of St. Peter Chrysologus set us a good example; while the saint himself remains an inspiration and a guide for the proper approach to God's holy word. How do you act and react toward God's word as proclaimed in and outside of the liturgy?

2. St. Barbara. *Day of death*: (according to the Martyrology) December 4, about 300. *Grave*: according to one tradition in the diocese of Torzello, Piacenza; according to another in St. Michael's monastery at Kiev. *Picture*: with a chalice and host beside a tower having three windows; or with a sword. The feast of St. Barbara was added to the Roman calendar in the twelfth century, but popular veneration is much older. *Life* (legendary). Barbara hailed from Nicomedia, was the daughter of a pagan noble who worshipped false gods. Because of her beauty her father enclosed her in a tower to hide her from the snares of men. Barbara vowed virginity, and during an absence of her father had a third window added to her quarters in honor of the Blessed Trinity; at the same time she also adorned her bath with the sign of the holy Cross.

Upon his return her father was angered over these changes to the point of killing her; a miracle was needed to prevent the

act. She was hustled off to the magistrate, subjected to much torturing, and finally her own father wielded the sword that severed her head; but immediately God's vengeance struck him dead. — The holy virgin is highly honored both in the East and the West as patroness of artillery men and of miners. She is especially invoked for preservation from sudden death. *Application.* In times past a beautiful little prayer to St. Barbara was very popular:

Saint Barbara, thou noble bride,
To thee my body I confide
As well in life as at life's end.

Come, aid me when I breathe my last
That I may, ere here all is past,
Receive the Blessed Sacrament!

In certain parts of Europe the so-called "Barbara branch" is brought into homes today. It consists of a small cherry twig that is set in water and should blossom on Christmas eve. The custom is deeply Biblical and liturgical. "The bud from the root of Jesse and the flower from its root" is Jesus Christ whom we expectantly await during Advent and who will blossom forth as a flower at Christmas.

3. Holy Mass (In medio). The Mass honoring St. Peter Chrysologus is from the Common of Doctors of the Church. "In the midst of the Church He (Christ) opens the mouth of the Doctor" today venerated in Christendom. Here we are given the correct approach — in the sermon Christ is speaking; today we see Peter, tomorrow some one else, or the pastor, or another priest; but actually it is Christ who is always performing His office of preaching through them. And His work will ever continue: "Preach, and continue preaching whether it be opportune or inopportune; reprove, plead, punish using greatest patience and wisdom" (*Epis.*).

In the Mass we celebrate the death of a saint in whom the beautiful ideal given in the Epistle was fulfilled: "I have fought

the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Moreover, there is reserved for me a crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will give to me on that Day; and not only to me, but also to all those who have lovingly yearned for His Second Coming." In the holy Sacrifice the Lord stands before us; He holds two crowns, one for the saint, one for me. Mass honoring a saint implies union in suffering *and* union in glory. Hence, the Eucharist also means truest and fullest *communion* with the saint. Peter had received five talents and at the coming of the Lord gained other five. Happily he could await Christ's advent. Nor may we appear empty-handed before the King! O Peter, lend us of your talents!

December 5

ST. SABBAS, Abbot

St. Sabbas. *Day of death*: December 5 at Mar Saba, the monastery he founded at Jerusalem in 532. *Grave*: in Venice. In Rome an ancient church on the Aventine is dedicated to him, which now belongs to the Collegium Germanicum. *Picture*: as an abbot with an apple. He was once tempted to eat an apple outside of the prescribed mealtime, whereupon he vowed never to eat apples again. *Life*. The Martyrology says: "At Mutala in Cappadocia the holy abbot Sabbas; in Palestine he gave the shining example of a holy life. Untiringly he labored in defense of the true faith against those opposing the Council of Chalcedon." In Jerusalem he built a famous *laura* (as oriental monasteries are called), which bears his name.

When the Arabs later conquered the Holy City, the monks fled to Rome, where they built a monastery and introduced the veneration of their saint. In the Eastern Church St. Sabbas ranks high in popular devotion; he is distinguished by the titles "God-

See, the Lord approaches,
the King supreme
over all the earth.
Blessed are they who have
readied themselves
to meet Him✚

bearer, the Saint, Citizen of the Holy City, Star of the Desert, Patriarch of Monks." His life was written by Cyril of Scythopolis. *Application.* Especially in Advent should we be willing to practice little acts of self-denial, like not eating between meals. By such victory over self the will is strengthened and enabled to resist severe temptations. — When Mass is celebrated in honor of St. Sabbas (which, of course, is permissible), the formulary used is that given in the Common of Abbots (*Os justi*).

December 6

ST. NICHOLAS, Bishop and Confessor

Joyful giving

In many quarters the feast of St. Nicholas is a glad day for children. Apples and nuts and cookies are given out — the joy of Christmas anticipated. Such family feasts are not alien to the liturgy; we must encourage them — while explaining and utilizing their spiritual implications.

1. **St. Nicholas.** *Day of death*: (according to the Martyrology) December 6, about 350. *Grave*: originally at Myra; since 1087 at Bari in Apulia (church of the Benedictines). Only in the eleventh century was his feast added to the Roman calendar. *Life* (highly legendary). Nicholas was born at Patara in Asia Minor to parents who, having long been childless, had petitioned God with many prayers. Already as a youth Nicholas became noted for his zeal in helping the unfortunate and oppressed. In his native city there lived a poor nobleman who had three marriageable daughters; he could not obtain a suitor for them because he could offer no dowry. The contemptible idea struck him to sacrifice the innocence of his daughters to gain the needed money. When Nicholas became aware of this, he went by night and threw a bag containing as much gold as was needed for a dowry through the

window. This he repeated the second and third nights. During a sea voyage he calmed the storm by his prayer; he is therefore venerated as patron of seamen. On a certain occasion he was imprisoned for the faith. In a wonderful way he later became bishop of Myra; his presence is noted at the Council of Nice. He died a quiet death in his episcopal city, uttering the words: "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit."

Nicholas is highly venerated in the East as a miracle-worker, as "preacher of the word of God, spokesman of the Father." Popular veneration almost places him on the same plane as Mary; pictures of the Virgin and of St. Nicholas are placed side by side. *Application.* We could try to put more liturgical content into the popular St. Nicholas feast. A blessing could be invoked upon the gifts, giving them sacramental value for the children. There is a goodly bit of genuine Christianity in joyous, loving gift-giving.

2. Holy Mass (Statuit). In the priest approaching the altar we see the venerable bishop Nicholas, but Nicholas himself is the image of the eternal High Priest who now in the Mass marches toward Jerusalem's gate to offer the Sacrifice of redemption; while we, following our saint, carry the cross of life after him (*Intr.*). Like Nicholas we want to be the "faithful steward" who used and doubled the talents of faith and grace; now in the holy Sacrifice "the Lord comes to hold an account" (every Mass is likewise a judgment: "The hungry He fills with good things, the rich He sends empty away."). By partaking in the sacrificial banquet we anticipate the joys which Nicholas possesses in vision. May we "through the merits and prayers of St. Nicholas be preserved from the flames of hell" (*Coll.*).

December 7

ST. AMBROSE, Bishop and Doctor of the Church

1. St. Ambrose. *Day of death*: April 4, 397 (today is the day of his ordination, 374). *Grave*: at S. Ambrogio in Milan. *Picture*: as a bishop with book and beehive. *Life.* About the year 333 Ambrose was born at Trier, the child of a noble Roman family. After his father's death he went to Rome, was soon appointed consul with residence at Milan. While attempting to settle a dispute between the Arians and Catholics over the choice of a bishop, he himself was chosen, although only a catechumen at the time. Thereupon he devoted himself wholeheartedly to the study of theology, and gave his possessions to the poor. He was an illustrious preacher, and through his sermons brought Augustine to the faith and baptized him.

Candid and fearless no matter how strong the opposition, Ambrose was directed to confront Maximus, the murderer of the Emperor Gatian. When Maximus refused to do penance, Ambrose excommunicated him. Later he denied Emperor Theodosius entrance into church for his massacre of the inhabitants of Thessalonica. It was on this occasion that allusion was made tc David as murderer and adulterer, and Ambrose retorted: "You have followed him in sin, now follow him in repentance." Humbly Theodosius accepted the penance imposed.

We often meet the saint in the Divine Office as a teacher and as an inspired composer of hyms (fourteen of the hymns attributed to him are definitely authentic, true pearls of religious poetry). His writings are vibrant with ancient Christian liturgical spirit, for his life was wholly rooted in mystery and sacrament. The layman, too, can profit greatly by reading Ambrose's works. He is one of the four great Latin Doctors of the Church. *Application.* We might well honor St. Ambrose as an outstanding liturgist. May he inspire us to accomplish in this twentieth century what he did in his day, for in the liturgy we have the primary, the indispensable fountain of Christian living.

December 8

THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

This day a bud came forth out of the root of Jesse:
this day Mary was conceived without any stain of sin;
this day the head of the old serpent was crushed by her, alleluia.
(*Magn. Ant.*)

Today's feast emphasizes primarily the extraordinary fullness of grace granted to Mary in the first moment of her conception. We likewise celebrate her exalted prerogative of being the only person who through the merits of Jesus Christ was preserved from every stain of original sin.

In its origin and purpose today's feast has no relation to Advent. It was placed on December 8 simply to complete the needed nine month period before September 8, the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. However, the feast readily lends itself to Advent themes. During the time when we are awaiting the Savior, when we are striving to arouse in ourselves a deep consciousness of the need for redemption, when we lovingly look up to Mary as our chiefest model, then indeed does this feast seem like the golden dawn before the rising sun of Christmas. December 8, therefore, is a genuine Advent feast.

History of the Feast. The feast first appears during the sixth-

seventh century in the Greek Church as a celebration in honor of the conception of St. Anne on December 9, and already in the tenth-eleventh century it had become a holyday. By way of Naples it came to the West, where it first took root in Ireland and Normandy. All through the Middle Ages the dogmatic foundation of the mystery was contested. Only through the Breviary reform of Pius V did the feast become universal; and it was not until 1854 that Pius IX raised it to the rank of a holyday of obligation for the entire Church. The first Immaculate Conception Office was composed in 1855 by the Jesuit Passaglia, but when he lapsed from the faith, our present text was substituted in 1863 (its prototype is said to stem from Gavantus).

1. **Divine Office.** *First Vespers* (the evening before). The festive ringing of Vesper bells thrills our hearts and transports us to the dawning hour of redemption. God's eternal decree is being fulfilled; Mary's immaculate, grace-laden soul is being united with her holy body to form a dwelling-place for His Son among men. A resplendent model for the child of God, the Virgin Immaculate rises before us; joyously we repeat her song of praise, *Magnificat,* My soul magnifies the Lord!

Matins. The darkness of late evening descends and quiets the noise and cares of the day; a solemn silence begins to reign. Through her mystical members the Church lifts up her hands; it is Matins, the prayer-hour of the night. She appears today as Mary, the holy, spotless bride, the immaculate Mother of God. In holy thoughtfulness my eye turns back into eternity and beholds Mary as the firstborn before all creation and the reflection of the eternal Light, chosen by the Most Blessed Trinity as the immaculately conceived. Gradually a form rises out of the golden background of time and there appears in the heavens a woman, clothed with the sun and with the moon beneath her feet; it is the revelation of God's glory to the eyes of all nations. Again the scene is clarified and I behold Mary as the Bride of God, wrapped in the radiant brilliance of Christ the King; descending upon Lebanon in heavenly fairness, adorned with grace as with a crown, she appears among the children of men. The gates of a

lost paradise may open and the dark stream of original sin may flood the world, but Mary crushes the serpent's head and becomes the bright star of solace to an accursed earth.

Lauds. The blessed day in dewy freshness breaks away from the darkness of night and spreads new life over nature and the human soul. The Mystical Christ is celebrating the hour of resurrection and calls upon all creatures to praise God. The spotless bride, the Church and the soul, adorns herself to receive her Bridegroom; in the *Benedictus* she hails Him as the *Oriens ex alto.*

Prime. Preparation for my journey through the day. I turn the divine light in my soul upon my duties, upon the happy and bitter hours of the day; it should be a bridal march, a *via immaculata.*

Terce. First pause on the way! The warmth of divine life and the power of the Holy Spirit pulsate through Church and soul: "Your garments are white as snow; and your face is as the sun!"

It is now time for holy Mass.

Sext. Second pause on the way. There is a dark side to every feast, the struggle against sin; yet from Golgotha there comes victory. May the grace of today's Mass transform the Eve within me more and more into Mary!

None. "Draw us, O Virgin Immaculate; we will run after you in the odor of your ointments!" It is turning toward evening; my soul is full of inner peace, ready to surrender itself to the Creator through Mary's hands, assured of a life of eternal glory at the Lord's return on the Last Day.

Second Vespers. The sun sets silently, solemnly, its last rays enveloping the day of redemption in transfigured splendor. In my soul all is quiet, holy; for today I was permitted to be a "bud from the root of Jesse." I was permitted to become a little image of Mary's grace, with the flame of sacrifice consuming all the stains in my soul. I gathered new strength to crush the head of the old serpent, to overcome the lower man in me, and to strive after spotless purity (*Magn. Ant.*). "My soul magnifies the Lord, for He has done great things to me!"

2. **Holy Mass (Gaudens gaudebo).** The climax of the feast comes with the holy Sacrifice in honor of Mary Immaculate. *Introit.* As a song of triumph after the defeat sin had brought upon mankind, as a ray of light out of the dark, this song of rejoicing wells forth from the lips of God's spotless bride. One must indeed hear or sing the soaring melody to sense the ecstatic joy it radiates. It is a song that every newly-baptized could well sing, every child of God when it thinks of the garment of sanctifying grace received in baptism, confirmation, and the Eucharist. For priests the Introit has a very special message: the interior garment of grace finds an expressive symbol in the sacred vestments worn at the altar.

The *Lesson* throws open the past ages of eternity to reveal Mary in God's providential plan, and how she joyed in the divine presence. The reading concludes with an instruction calling those blessed who "daily watch at her gates." Her way God "made immaculate" by a divine privilege; but we must strive after spotlessness of life by "watching" daily. In the Epistle and the Introit it is Mary who speaks. The remaining chants come from the lips of Mother Church. In the *Gradual* she voices her holy rapture, the melody of *Tu gloria Jerusalem* being expressive of her emotion deeper than words; she is lost in holy admiration as she contemplates the true Victor over Holofernes and hell.

More sober and majestic the *Alleluia* that follows. True, again there overflows unspeakable happiness, yet in the first minor cadence one senses a tremor as of the eternal Word that in the *Gospel* descends into the Virgin's womb. The angel's *gratia plena* is echoed in the words, "You are all fair!" But the greeting rings loud and clear at the *Offertory* as a full and triumphant song of joy. What *we* offer is not "full" measure; only *she* is "full of grace," blessed in all things. Mary's privilege of the Immaculate Conception is the primary object of praise in the *Communion;* but we may think of the wondrous graces given to the Church and to our souls, for "He who is mighty" has not restricted His blessings. Here again the Communion of Saints helps us: God looks benevolently upon us because He actually

is gazing upon the Virgin Immaculate; Mary is supplying our spiritual deficiencies. Pray the *Postcommunion* slowly; the deathly wound of sin's sting and our Immaculate Mother stand at opposite poles; what she was from the beginning, that we should become through the Eucharist, spotless.

3. The Gospel. Why does the Gospel account break off so abruptly? The liturgy seems satisfied with the angel's greeting: *"Ave, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus."* In these few words heaven itself announced how great was the realm of grace that came to Mary. Observe, the angel speaks quite positively. He does not say, as we perhaps would: You are free from original sin, free from all personal sin. Since grace or God's kingdom is something difficult to describe with earthly words and pictures, the angel points out a threefold relationship: the kingdom with reference to Mary herself, to God, and to mankind.

Gratia plena. Mary herself is "full of grace." Implicitly her soul is compared to a vessel filled to the brim. The kingdom of God came to Mary in the fullest possible measure. We too are vessels of grace; not full of grace, yet the kingdom of God is within us. That is our great treasure and we carry it through life in a "fragile vessel." Let us take heed lest we upset it. And let us strive to fill it, even to the brim.

Dominus tecum. God was with Mary! Yes, He even dwelt in her womb. Grace is a divine substance, a participation in divine life. To obtain grace is to become divine. Hence God is *with one* who has grace. See how this helps to understand the priest's greeting, *Dominus vobiscum*, which is, at the same time, a wish and a gift. The priest administers and transmits grace, hence also God. With every grace God Himself comes. Grace makes us like the Mother of God, makes us God-bearers, Christ-bearers.

Benedicta tu. Only God's kingdom elevates us above other men; grace alone gives nobility. True kingship is participation in Christ's kingship. However, this nobility here upon earth is hidden under poverty, lowliness, humility. As Mary led a hidden life amid external poverty, yes, as Christ in bonds said to Pilate,

"I am a King," so with us too the nobility and richness of grace must be joined to external lowliness.

4. Four Phases in the Life of the Immaculate Virgin. In the Mass and Divine Office the liturgy unfolds the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary, showing how it extends from eternity to eternity. Thus four phases may be distinguished:

a) Mary's life in God's eternal bosom. The Lesson announces: "The Lord possessed me in the beginning of His ways . . . I was set up from eternity . . . the depths were not as yet. . . ." In the plan of Providence Mary existed from all eternity as the Mother of God, as the Immaculate, as wisdom, i.e., the perfect image of divine holiness.

b) Mary in type and prophecy. Here Mary passes through the Old Testament in figure and prophetic oracle. God Himself pointed out the woman who crushed the head of the serpent (*Breviary lesson*). The great women of the Old Testament rise before our eyes: Eve, Sarah, Judith (*Gradual*). The prophets speak of her, e.g., Isaias: "a Virgin will conceive. . . ." Mary lives in the Old Testament!

c) Mary's earthly life. The Introit takes us back to the first moment of her human existence and we hear her song of thanks for being immaculately conceived: "I greatly rejoice in the Lord, for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, and with the robe of justice He has covered me, as a bride adorned with her jewels." Shortly thereafter we witness the second great hour of her life, that for which she had been adorned as a bride; and from the angel's mouth comes the glorious greeting: "Full of grace, the Lord is with thee!"

d) Mary's heavenly life. At present she is enthroned on high, Queen of the universe. And when today the Bride enters the heavenly bridal chamber, it is with her first thanksgiving prayer: *Gaudens gaudebo,* greatly do I rejoice in the Lord . . . (*Intr.*). God prepared a temple for His Son, more beautiful than Solomon's, the body and soul of Mary Immaculate. — See what tremendous vistas open before the mind endeavoring to appreciate Mary's grace and dignity.

5. God's Kingdom in All its Fullness. In the Advent season, when we are yearning for God's kingdom, Mary appears as its supreme expression. Her feast, therefore, is another inducement to give serious thought to the kingdom of God. When we pray in the Our Father, "Thy kingdom come," we usually think of the geographical and temporal expansion of God's realm, viz., for more baptisms. Much less thought do we give to how this kingdom might flourish and expand unto fullness within us. Actually it is the interior approach that the feast of the Immaculate Conception would underscore.

In many ways we have a rather imperfect understanding of today's mystery. We consider its significance this: Mary was born without sin, indeed she was free from original sin from the first moment of her existence. We fail to see how purely negative this assertion is. Mary's sinlessness is not the main thing; it is but the smaller part of her greatness. Sinlessness would hardly make her much different from a newly-baptized infant. For us likewise to be sinless is the reverse aspect of our Christian ideal; a demented Christian can be sinless too. A Christian's greatness depends on grace, on the degree of fulness and thoroughness of God's kingdom in his soul. That sin be put more and more into the background and banished is, of course, important; but it is not the principal thing. The angel says to Mary: "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women." He speaks very positively. He does not say: Thou art conceived without sin, thou didst remain unstained by original sin. He says, *full of grace,* i.e., the kingdom of God is in you with a fullness, a strength, a firmness that no other creature possesses.

Next we ask: Can God's kingdom grow and increase within us? Many think the less they sin the more holy they are. Surely we must avoid sin, must aim to become ever more pure in heart. Yet our holiness does not rest on this alone. A comparison. You have an old, dirty shirt; even after all the spots and stains are carefully removed, the shirt is not bright and new again. But we can become "bright and new" by receiving additional grace. One

often hears Christians ~~who strive after perfection~~ utter the complaint: I am not making any progress; on the contrary, I am getting worse. That is a mistake. Perhaps they are confusing grace and holiness with the practice of the virtues. I readily grant that Christians who are zealous in the practice of virtues will also receive more grace; nevertheless, we must not confuse virtues with grace. There might be a Christian, for example, easily inclined to anger which he finds hard to control, yet with an abundance of grace in his soul; while another who by nature is very gentle may have less of the fullness of God's kingdom.

Finally, this too must be avoided, viz., confusing emotions and moods with grace. Some persons, when suffused with religious sentiments, think themselves rich in grace; but when they are tempted or when they feel a dryness or abandonment, they imagine that grace is withdrawn. Hold fast to this: the kingdom of God may not be confused with sinlessness, with the practice of virtue, or with pious sentiments. Can then the kingdom of God grow in us? Certainly. If the kingdom of God within us is *life*, then certainly such life can grow stronger or become weaker. In nature, plants, insects, animals, man — each has a different type of life. If the kingdom of God is light, then this light can shine more brightly. An electric bulb may have 10, 100, 1000 candlepower. The kingdom of God *can* grow and increase within us.

What can we contribute to its growth? That, in the first place, is God's affair. Grace is a pure gift from God, we cannot merit it. God gave Mary the highest fullness of His kingdom; she was

not conscious of it, however, and could contribute nothing to it. God determines the election to grace, also its degree. But naturally, our cooperation is necessary. What this implies is no secret. There must be self-surrender ("I am the handmaid of the Lord"); there must be prayer, the great means of grace; the sacraments, especially the Eucharist; a love of suffering; the fulfilling of one's duties; there is, finally, the growth of the soul through the liturgical year. Let us be docile and cooperative with God, and He will bestow that fullness of His kingdom destined to each in His eternal decree.

December 10

ST. MELCHIADES, Pope and Martyr

1. St. Melchiades. *Day of death*: January 10, 314. *Grave*: originally in the cemetery of St. Callistus, later his remains were removed to S. Silvester delle Monache in Rome; his head is venerated in the basilica of San Salvatore (Rome), and other relics in the church of St. Praxedes. *Life*. The Martyrology gives this information: "At Rome St. Melchiades, who suffered much during the persecution of Maximianus; when at last peace was restored to the Church, he died in the Lord." He was an African whom St. Augustine calls "the true child of the peace of Jesus Christ." He ruled the Church of God in the last period of the Christian persecution from 311–314; hence the title of martyr is applied to him in a wider sense. His was the good fortune of witnessing the begining of an era of peace, for in 312 the Emperor Constantine granted freedom to the Church. *Application*. Christ's champions must suffer and labor for peace inwardly and outwardly, as long as it is God's will. Peace comes to the Church as the fruit of the suffering and sacrifice of the faithful and their shepherds. The Church's peace after the death of St. Melchiades produced a period when the liturgy flourished gloriously unto the benefit of all.

December 11

ST. DAMASUS, Pope and Confessor

Who calmed the wild waves of the sea,
Whose power gives life to the seed dormant in the earth,
Who for Lazarus could loosen the bonds of death,
And restore a brother on the third day to his sister Martha—
Christ will, so I firmly believe, awaken me, Damasus,
from death! [1]

1. St. Damasus. *Day of death*: December 11, 384. *Grave*: originally in the Damasus crypt on the Via Ardeatina, but transferred later to the church of St. Laurence in Damaso by Pope Paul I. *Life.* Damasus was a Spaniard. His father, Antonius, worked in the archives of the Roman Church; his mother, Laurentia, lived to the age of ninety-two. As a youth Damasus too worked in the papal archives. He was elected pope in the year 366, and at first had much to suffer from the opposition party of Ursicinus. He occupied the Chair of Peter from 366 to 384.

The Church had recently acquired liberty and now it was the task of the popes to develop her potentialities, especially in matters pertaining to divine worship. Damasus proved himself equal to the task. It is to his credit to have given the Church a good translation of the Sacred Scriptures. He called upon St. Jerome to render the Bible into Latin, the version later called the Vulgate. This translation is still used in the liturgy. On his feast day Damasus tells us: Read the Bible zealously.

He was also much interested in the liturgy. He is said to have introduced the chant of the psalms into all the Roman churches; the singing was to be by alternating choirs with the "Glory be to the Father . . ." added at the end of each psalm. In imitation of a custom at Jerusalem he introduced the *Alleluia* into Sunday Masses. Pope Damasus also provided honorable burial for the bodies of many martyrs and composed inscriptions in verse for almost all of the then-known martyrs, thereby becoming their

[1] The saint's tomb inscription, which he himself composed.

highly distinguished panegyrist. St. Jerome said of him: "He was the virgin teacher of a virgin Church." A splendid encomium for any priest.

2. Holy Mass (Si diligis me). The Mass, from the Common of Sovereign Pontiffs, is a completely new formulary; its dominant theme is our Savior's promise to Peter as it continues to be fulfilled and realized in the apostle's successors, the Roman pontiffs. Two of Christ's pronouncements to Peter dominate the text. The words, "If you love Me, Simon Peter, feed My sheep, feed My lambs," ring out in the Introit and continue to resound during the first part of the Mass as the "shepherd motif"; while the words, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church," occur repeatedly from the Alleluia verse to the end of the sacred service.

The *Introit* departs from classical models by using a New Testament text as an antiphon. Enclosed in its frame, Psalm 29 comes from the lips of the day's saint and pope as an expression of gratitude for the call to shepherd the flock of Christ and for the protection from enemies accorded him in the task. We think of Christ's words, "The gates of hell shall not prevail." (There is no indication that the remaining verses of the psalm are alluded to.)

Reference to the Mass' double theme is easily seen in the two *Collects*. In the first God is addressed as "the eternal Shepherd" who should look mercifully upon His flock and protect it through the intercession of the day's saint and sovereign pontiff whom He appointed as shepherd over the whole Church. The second Oration, which is used very rarely, bases its petition upon the promise, "The gates of hell. . . ."

Appropriately the *Epistle*, a new selection, comes from the pen of Peter himself. The first supreme shepherd is admonishing his successors: "I exhort the presbyters among you — I, your fellow-presbyter and witness to the sufferings of Christ (Peter was present on Olivet during Christ's agony and seizure), the partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed in time to come — tend the flock of God which is among you, governing not by

constraint, but willingly, according to God; nor yet as lording it over your charges, but becoming from the heart a pattern to the flock. And when the Prince of the shepherds appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. The God of all grace, who has called us unto His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will Himself, after we have suffered a little while, perfect, strengthen and establish us. To Him is the dominion forever and ever. Amen." There is no need to labor the point that this selection significantly enriches the treasury of Missal readings.

The *Gradual*, which by nature should echo the Epistle, associates the words *seniores* and *consenior* with a verse from Psalm 106, and points to the elevation of the day's saint to the Chair of Peter. The *Alleluia* verse anticipates the Gospel, putting into relief its principal message, "You are Peter (the Rock), and upon this rock I will build My Church." Christ's words have been fulfilled in the papacy; for through the ages the popes have proven to be the immovable rock-foundation of holy Church. The *Gospel* presents Biblical proof that the primacy of Peter and of his successors was divinely willed and instituted. Through the centuries the popes have guided the Church with a sure and steady hand; they have held the keys to God's kingdom in heaven and on earth; and in them we see realized repeatedly our blessed Savior's prophecy that hell with all its powers will not triumph.

Today's *Offertory*, a passage from Jeremias, is usually applied to the Savior's precursor in the liturgy, "See, I am putting My words in your mouth. I am placing you over nations and kingdoms that you may destroy and tear down, that you may build and plant" (Jer. 1:9–10). The divine Shepherd is addressing Peter and his successors; to them He entrusts the work of teaching infallibly; upon them He places the threefold crown (tiara), and with them leaves the power to bind and to loose.

The *Secret* again touches upon the Introit motif: may God's pleasure rest upon flock and shepherd. While the faithful approach the Lord's table, we hear the familiar passage, "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church." It is a message that applies not only to the day's sainted pontiff, but to

every one present before the altar. For each Christian must be a rock in faith and in grace and in love — a rock upon which Christ can build a spiritual church. Holy Communion is part of His construction work.

Classic in form and content, the first *Postcommunion* is pointed less toward individual Christians than toward the Church now "nourished with holy refreshment" through the Eucharist; it petitions guidance, freedom, and purity of faith for the papacy. In the second Postcommunion the shepherd motif is met for the last time; note in particular the phrase parallelism: "The shepherd will not lack obedience from his flock, nor the flock lack the shepherd's protecting care." — All considered, a beautiful and instructive Mass formulary. One might, however, remark that its frequent occurrence (more than 24 times a year) could lessen devotion, while the previous arrangement did offer greater variety.

December 13

ST. LUCY, Virgin and Martyr

Lucy, radiating light, readies us for the Light of Christmas

Today's feast can easily be harmonized with Advent themes. The very name *Lucy* pulsates with light, a living symbol amid the season's darkness (the days are now the shortest of the year). As a wise virgin Lucy advances with a burning lamp to meet the Bridegroom. She typifies the Church and the soul now preparing their bridal robes for a Christmas marriage.

1. St. Lucy. *Day of death*: December 13, about 304. *Grave*: at Venice since 1204. *Picture*: with a sword and with two eyes on a plate. *Life*. That the famous Sicilian martyr really lived may be deduced from the great popular veneration accorded her since most ancient times. The *Acts* detailing her sufferings, however, merit little credence. According to these she made a pilgrimage to Catonia with her mother, who suffered from hemorrhage, to

venerate the body of St. Agatha. After praying devoutly at the tomb, Agatha appeared to her in a dream and consoled her: "O virgin Lucy, why do you ask of me what you yourself can procure for your mother? For your faith too has come to her aid and therefore she has been cured. By your virginity you have indeed prepared for God a lovely dwelling." And her mother actually was healed.

Immediately Lucy asked permission to remain a virgin and to distribute her future dowry among Christ's poor. Child and mother returned to their native city Syracuse, and Lucy proceeded to distribute the full proceeds from the sale of her property among the poor. When a young man to whom Lucy's parents had promised the virgin's hand against her will had heard of the development, he reported her to the city prefect as a Christian. "Your words will be silenced," the prefect said to her, "when the storm of blows falls upon you!" The virgin: "To God's servants the right words will not be wanting, for the Holy Spirit speaks in us." "Yes," she continued, "all who live piously and chastely are temples of the Holy Spirit." "Then," he replied, "I shall order you put with prostitutes and the Holy Spirit will depart from you." Lucy: "If I am dishonored against my will, my chastity will secure for me a double crown of victory."

Aflame with anger, the judge imposed the threatened order. But God made the virgin solidly firm in her place and no force could move her. "With such might did the Holy Spirit hold her firm that the virgin of Christ remained immovable." Thereupon they poured heated pitch and resin over her: "I have begged my Lord Jesus Christ that this fire have no power over me. And in testimony of Him I have asked a postponement of my death" (*Resp.*). When she had endured all this without the least injury, they pierced her throat with a sword. Thus she victoriously ended her martyrdom.

2. Holy Mass (Dilexisti). A bridal song gladdens our ears as we celebrate Mass. The bride Lucy is espoused to the King's Son, and we are drawn into the nuptials. Psalm 44: My heart is stirred with joyous song when at Lucy's side I make my way to the

church; it is a bridal march to meet the coming Lord. In the resplendent wedding hall (the church), I see Christ enthroned, the fairest of the children of men. He is girded with valor and justice, and sharp arrows pierce the heart of His enemies. With Lucy I think of the angry judge whose command God frustrated. To the right of the King I behold the Queen, Holy Church, garbed in gold and shining blood-red in virginal splendor. Invitingly she raises her hand: "You maiden, hear. Behold, and turn your ear; in Lucy you shall be betrothed as a chaste bride to the King! Forget your people and your father's house; your treasure and your pearl is the Lord, your God. Him you must adore!" (Here is an example of how an entire *Introit* Psalm may enrich the Mass action.)

In the *Epistle* the Church assures us that in baptism she has betrothed us to one man, Christ. Complete surrender and love for Christ is the precious pearl, the great treasure, for which one must sacrifice all (*Gosp.*). At the *Offertory* I am, together with Lucy and the wise virgins in bridal array, offered at the altar and united with Christ's Sacrifice (the old books had *offerentur*, not *afferentur*). The King makes His appearance in the Canon; He permits me to share Lucy's glorification, and in the sacrificial Banquet He enters my body. — The Divine Office abounds in texts culled from or prompted by the legendary *Acts*. Vespers and Lauds have proper antiphons, while the psalms are from the Common.

December 16

ST. EUSEBIUS, Bishop and Martyr

The martyrs cherished intense Advent longing

1. St. Eusebius. *Day of death*: August 1, 371. Since the feast of St. Peter in Chains falls on August 1, Clement VIII (1592–1605) transferred the feast of St. Eusebius to the anniversary of his episcopal consecration, December 15. When the feast of the

Immaculate Conception received an octave, it was moved to December 16. *Grave*: at Vercelli in upper Italy. *Life*. Eusebius, first a lector in Rome, later bishop of Vercelli, was one of the great defenders of Christ's divinity in the struggle against the Arians. His stand brought untold sufferings and persecutions, including banishment to Scythopolis (Palestine). Later he was allowed to return to his see and die in peace, but because of the harsh exile inflicted upon him, he is honored as a martyr in the wider sense. He was the first in the West to introduce community life among the priests serving the same church, in order to celebrate the liturgy more perfectly. *Application*. Community spirit and community worship is an aim of our modern liturgical movement. The Church and our age require active participation in prayer and Sacrifice. Are we still too individualistic in our thinking and acting, too isolated, too self-seeking?

2. **Holy Mass (Sacerdotes Dei).** The Mass is the second one from the Common of a Martyr Bishop. *Gospel*: immediately after Peter's solemn confession at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus began preparing His disciples for His passion and death. For the first time He tells them of His suffering and of His crucifixion. And a further point: not only will He suffer, they too must follow Him, carrying the cross. This sermon on the Cross comes to us on the feast of a martyr bishop, one in whom its message was again verified; for he renounced himself, embraced the cross, hated his life on earth. Therefore, to him too was the consoling promise given: The Son of Man shall come in the glory of the Father and His angels to bestow the reward. At his death the Lord came to Eusebius; in this advent we too will one day share.

In the *Epistle* the holy martyr stands before us and says: Only if you are my companions in suffering may you share in my "consolation." At the *Offertory* we lay the crosses of our lives on the altar, while in the sacrificial banquet we receive the pledge of a heavenly "crown set with jewels" (*Comm.*). Three times there is reference to the saint's priestly dignity (*Intr.*, *All.*, *Off.*), a reminder to see our venerable martyr bishop in the priest at the altar.

For technical reasons we are now obliged to give, along with the calendar of the saints, those parts of the Advent liturgy which ar fixed to a definite day of the month, e.g., the "O" antiphons.

December 17

O Wisdom, You ordered all things mightily and sweetly

On December 17 begin the Church's final efforts at preparation for Christmas. With special solemnity seven "O" antiphons are sung at Vespers. The first "O" antiphon reads as follows:

"O Wisdom, You came forth from the mouth of the Most High, and reaching from beginning to end, You ordered all things mightily and sweetly. *Come*, and teach us the way of prudence!"

The Son of God's pre-mundane existence in the bosom of the Father and His epiphany through creation! Creation is an image of the kingdom of grace in which the Redeemer orders our souls "mightily and sweetly."

Reflections. In studying the "O" antiphons we will keep in mind (a) that each antiphon contains one or more Old Testament types or figures; (b) that each such allusion has a message for the new dispensation of grace; the point of comparison (*tertium comparationis*) must be sought and evaluated. (a) The Old Testament figure. The Wisdom books of the Old Testament contain many, many passages in praise of "wisdom." One of the various senses in which the word is used refers to the divine attribute of wisdom; and this attribute at times is personified. Accordingly we read of wisdom as proceeding from God, as being begotten by Him, as the breath of His power, the effusion

of His glory. Wisdom is the beloved daughter who at the beginning of creation stood before God, assisting in the creation of the visible universe. From the concept of wisdom there later developed the doctrine of the *Logos* (the Word) in St. John's Gospel.

But wisdom is also represented as a human attribute, as the foundation of all virtue. It is not so much knowledge and human prudence as knowing how to live, holiness. Its ultimate root is the fear of God ("The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom"), its final goal is divine knowledge and love. The first part of our antiphon is taken from the Book of Sirach (24:3), the second part from the Book of Wisdom (8:1). If you have a Bible, look up these passages and scan the context. In highly poetic phraseology the origin and co-creative activity of wisdom are portrayed. How easily these passages can be referred to the Second Divine Person is common knowledge, an approach the liturgy unequivocally uses. The Son of God has "gone forth from the mouth of the Most High," i.e., was begotten from the substance of the Father in an eternal generation.

The text continues with the creative activity of the Son of God. John says in the Prolog to his Gospel: "All things were made by Him (the *Logos*) and without Him was made nothing that was made." And Paul wrote to the Colossians: "In Him (Christ) were all things created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible" (Col. 1:16). Hence, according to the New Testament, too, Christ as the pre-mundane *Logos* is the Creator and archetype of the material universe. How beautifully our antiphon describes the Logos as wisdom encompassing and ordering all things! The two essentials for good government are power and gentleness. By the first Christ achieves His ends, by the second He uses such means as harmonize with the nature of secondary agents. We could here reflect on the wisdom, power and balance in creation. But all this is merely the figure, the prelude to the main consideration.

b) The Advent message. It is the object of the antiphon to portray the New Testament Creator of the invisible spiritual

world rather than the Maker of the visible, material universe about us. Creation, with its glorious order, power and beauty, is but a faint type of the new creation established by Christ. In His Church and in the soul "He reaches from beginning to end"; He is and remains in this universe till the end of time. How well "He orders all things mightily and sweetly"! Yes, here we have an expression of His divine-human personality, *fortiter et suaviter*. Examples of both attributes could easily be cited from His earthly life, how He was infinitely mighty and forceful, and then again sweet and gentle. How these traits complement each other! His gentleness does not make Him weak, neither is His mightiness harsh. Truly, His earthly life indicates His method of acting in the Church and in the soul.

Come, teach us the way of prudence! What an all-embracing petition! Make us perfect Christians, Christians who are wholly penetrated — mind, will, and emotions — with the leaven of Christianity. Make us true Christian personalities who combine strength with gentleness. Make us strong in battle against hell, the world and self; make us glow with the love of God and neighbor! Enable us to show virile courage, and heroism unto martyrdom. Enable us to show the virgin gentleness and sweetness of a bride. In this sense we pray, "Thy kingdom come!"

All this is part of our yearning plea, *Come*! teach us the way of prudence!

December 18

Come, and with an outstretched arm redeem us!

At Vespers, the second "O" antiphon is sung:

"O Adonai (God of the covenant) and Ruler of the house of Israel, You appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush, and on Mount Sinai gave him Your Law: *Come*, and with an outstretched arm redeem us!"

The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity had an active part in creation, as noted in yesterday's "O" antiphon. Now the

liturgy, seeing Christ in the perspective of divinity, finds Him active in the Old Testament. Christ was the "Covenant of God" (Adonai) of the Chosen People. He made a covenant with Noe, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and with Moses; He was the Ruler of the Jewish people through history; two of His many appearances are mentioned in the antiphon, the burning thornbush and the giving of the Law on Sinai amid lightning and thunder, both figures of the Christmas light. The petition associates the deliverance from Egypt with redemption from the bonds of Satan.

Reflections. Again we will first consider the figure or type, and then its spiritual implication or fulfillment. (a) The figure. One of the most important events in the history of the Jewish people was their deliverance out of Egypt. Its impact upon the nation is attested by a vast number of texts and allusions; and one of the greatest feasts, the Passover, was designed to commemorate God's mighty deed unto all generations. Israel's deliverance began when God appeared in the burning bush, for then He showed Himself as the "Covenant God," and commissioned Moses to lead His people. With the promulgation of the Law on Sinai, the work was complete; the Church of the Old Testament was founded. God had appeared to His people as their strong Deliverer and Redeemer. Like a general He marched before them "with an outstretched arm."

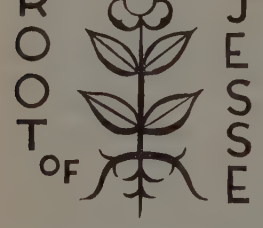
b) The deliverance from Egypt has always been regarded as a leading Old Testament type for Christ's work of redemption. Pharao is the infernal prince into whose bondage mankind had fallen through sin; Moses is the redeemer — Christ, who redeems. Of old God appeared in the thornbush, in the fullness of time He appeared on earth clothed in human flesh — even now

we are at the point of celebrating that appearance with admiration and joy. Year after year we are deeply impressed by God's visit to us. In silent awe Christendom stands before Bethlehem's crib. On Sinai God gave the Old Law amid lightning and thunder, on the Mount of the Beatitudes He announces the New Law with love and tenderness.

And today He wants to enter my soul, to be its Ruler and Lawgiver. "Come, follow Me," walk in My footsteps, He pleads. Christian life means following Christ. Christ wants to be my Law. Without law there is no kingdom of God. He wants to redeem me "with an outstretched arm," but can do so only on condition that I unite my will to His. Listen, soul, to His directions.

December 19

Today's Vespers bring the third "O" antiphon, the beautiful figure of the "bud from Jesse's root":



"O Root of Jesse, You stand for an ensign of mankind; before You kings shall keep silence, and to You all nations shall have recourse. *Come,* save us, and do not delay."

Reflections. (a) Figure and prophecy. The burden of the text is taken from various sections of the Book of Isaias (*see* 11:1; 11:10; 52:15). Let us try to unravel the liturgical synthesis. In spirit the prophet saw how Judah and the kingdom of David would be destroyed. But there would remain a holy root. From the stump of Jesse (the name of David's father) springs forth a twig, a twig that becomes a banner unto all nations. In its presence kings will become reverently silent, and the nations adore. It is clear that the prophet is speaking of the Messiah. David's royal line was dethroned with the exile and thereafter remained shrouded in oblivion — Jesse's stump. But

with Christ a new branch buds out of the old root; the throne of David is again occupied. "And the angel said to Mary: The Lord God will give unto Him the throne of David His Father; and He will reign in the house of Jacob forever." Christ is of the root of Jesse, both as a descendant of David and as occupant of the royal throne. The wording of the prophetic text, however, does not pass over our Savior's external lowliness and poverty.

The bulk of the antiphon is devoted to a description of the kingdom. The small twig becomes the unifying principle about which the nations will gather like soldiers and citizens about their flag. With yearning the peoples will assemble around Him, will turn and acknowledge Him as Ruler. The Messiah's glory will be so great that even kings will stand dumbstruck in wonder and awe.

b) Fulfillment. The antiphon sums up two aspects of the Messiah and His work. His origins may be humble, unimpressive; but His kingdom will embrace the whole earth, drawing all nations into it, and placing high and low under its rule. The parable of the mustard seed! The history of the Church and also the history of individual souls furnish many instances of the fulfillment of this prophecy. To note such cases is very gratifying and strengthens faith. Has not everything truly Christian begun humbly, from the acts of the apostles down to our own day? Sensational century projects, banner headlines and TV kudos remain alien to God's kingdom. Yet what a mighty force it is to those who humbly receive its grace! No obstacle is too great, no persecution too bloody. Christ, or let us say, the Cross is the banner of nations, the emblem about which those gather who seek redemption.

Now the petition: "*Come*, save us, and do not delay!" How does this fit into the glorious picture of God's kingdom? It is the dark page. Millions do not yet recognize the Savior's saving insignia of the Cross; leaders, dictators, presidents, mayors do not stand in silent awe before Christ's presence in the Church; rather it is still true what the psalmist said: "the Gentiles rage . . . and kings rise up, while princes unite against God and His

Christ." Or even if one stays in the realms of his own soul — is Christ perfectly sovereign in every quarter? "Come, Lord, save us! Please do not delay."

December 20

The fourth "O" antiphon:

"O Key of David and Sceptre of the house of Israel: You open and no man closes; You close and no man opens. *Come*, and deliver him from the chains of prison who sits in darkness and in the shadow of death."

The six-pointed star is the Jewish symbol for the shield or key of David. To Jews it is still a symbol of God and His most holy Name. It also was for them a sign of the promised Messiah (star of Balaam). It should, then, be perfectly obvious that Christ is the "Key of David," i.e., the One who opens all the secrets and mysteries of the Old Testament. The sceptre implies a true fullness of power over God's kingdom.

Reflections. (a) The figure. Substantially the passage is from Apocalypse 3:7, where Christ speaks of Himself as the "Key of David who opens and no one shuts; who shuts and no one opens." But there also is a passage in Isaias (22:22) which corresponds almost word for word with our antiphon. The Old Testament text, however, is not messianic; it is directed to the faithful civil ruler whom God supports: "I will lay the key of the house of David upon his shoulder. He will open and no one will shut; he will snut, and no one will open." The symbol of handing over the keys denotes the conferral of supreme authority. With the keys he becomes chief executive and all his transactions are divinely approved. Evidently St. John borrowed the passage from Isaias and applied it to Christ, a precedent followed by the

liturgy. The antiphon puts additional stress on Christ's power by adding the title: "Sceptre of the house," or better, "*over* the house of Israel."

b) Exegesis. From the foregoing the antiphon's content is clear. Being the son of David, Christ is heir and possessor of David's keys, i.e., his kingdom. Now the kingdom of David has prophetic relationship to the kingdom of God. Thus Christ becomes the chief steward of the blessings of salvation. After His resurrection He said: "All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth." He could, accordingly, entrust this power to His Church and her ministers. Christ made use of the same symbol when He told Peter: "To you will I give the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind (i.e., shut) on earth, will be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose (i.e., open) on earth, will be loosed in heaven." Christ, therefore, has entrusted this right of stewardship to Peter. The power of the keys proper to the Apostolic See is none other than that had by Christ. In the kingdom of God Christ is the undisputed Ruler and Dispenser of grace. By opening and shutting is meant, to be specific, the forgiving of sins and bestowing of graces; and the contrary.

Lastly, the petition in our antiphon is somewhat more extended than on previous days. Christ holds the keys to the prison where Satan keeps men enchained. Through original sin mankind languishes in prison; redemption includes deliverance from this imprisonment. The antiphon describes it very realistically: captive mankind sits in darkness and in the black shadows of death. Imagine an ancient prison (they called it a "lion's den"). May Christ the Redeemer, we plead, unlock this prison, He has the key. May He convert the countless pagans whom Satan still holds captive; may He loose the bonds of sin and show sinners the rising light of Christmas. And are there no passions, no evil enticements from which He must free me?

Come, O Key of David! Come, O Sceptre of the house of Israel! Do come and deliver me from the imprisoning chains of sin; lead me out of darkness, away from the shadow of death. It is You who opens, and no man closes. Come!

December 21

ST. THOMAS, Apostle

Blessed are they who do not see and yet believe

It does not seem possible to find a harmonious setting for the feast of Thomas the Apostle during Advent. How easily it could be argued that Thomas, who touched the wounds of the risen Lord, belongs in the Easter season. There is one text, however, that the liturgy stresses, and this text insinuates a propriety now before Christmas. "Because you have seen Me, Thomas, you believe. Blessed are they who do not see and yet believe." For the coming Christmas mystery we need a strong, living faith; and all through Advent we have been hearing glad tidings that had to be accepted without seeing. In the Holy Night we will stand before the crib and the Church will simply say: This is the great King, the eternal God! At that moment the word directed to Thomas will help us tremendously: "Blessed are they who do not see and yet believe!"

1. St. Thomas. *Day of death*: unknown; the Greeks celebrate the feast on October 6; formerly, perhaps, on July 3. December 21 commemorates the translation of his relics to Edessa. *Grave*: originally in Mailapur, India; since the third century at Edessa; as St. John Chrysostom attests, now at Ortona (Italy). *Picture*: with a lance (because of his martyrdom) or with a square (because of the legend that he was sent as an architect to the king of India). *Life*. There is very little about the apostle Thomas in the Gospels; one text calls him the "twin." Rarely during Jesus' lifetime does he stand out among his colleagues. There is the instance before the raising of Lazarus, when Jesus was still in Perea and Thomas exclaimed: "Let us also go and die with Him." Best-known is his expression of unbelief after the Savior's death, giving rise to the phrase "doubting Thomas." Nevertheless, the passage describing the incident, had as today's Gospel, must be numbered among the most touching in Sacred Scripture.

In the Breviary lessons Pope St. Gregory the Great makes the

following reflections: "Thomas' unbelief has benefited our faith more than the belief of the other disciples; it is because he attained faith through physical touch that we are confirmed in the faith beyond all doubt. Indeed, the Lord permitted the apostle to doubt after the resurrection; but He did not abandon him in doubt. By his doubt and by his touching the sacred wounds the apostle became a witness to the truth of the resurrection. Thomas touched and cried out: My Lord and my God! And Jesus said to him: Because you have seen Me, Thomas, you have believed. Now if Thomas saw and touched the Savior, why did Jesus say: Because you have seen Me, Thomas, you have believed? Because he saw something other than what he believed. For no mortal man can see divinity. Thomas saw the Man Christ and acknowledged His divinity with the words: My Lord and my God. Faith therefore followed upon seeing."

Concerning later events in the apostle's life very meager information exists. The Martyrology has this: "At Calamina (near Madras in India) the martyrdom of the apostle Thomas. He announced the Gospel to the Parthians, and finally came to India. After he had converted numerous tribes to Christianity, he was pierced with lances at the king's command." The apostle Thomas is India's patron saint.

2. Holy Mass (Mihi autem). The Mass is dominated by the beautiful *Gospel* account of the risen Savior's appearance to Thomas. The *Communion* chant, taken from the Gospel, makes Christ's appearance a present reality; now in the Mass each one of us resembles Thomas; the Lord appears and invites us to stretch out our hands and touch His wounds, i.e., receive His sacred Body (in ancient days communicants took the sacred Host into their hands).

The *Introit* praises the apostles as "friends" of God and "princes of God's kingdom" (Psalm 138 was chosen for use in the liturgy on feasts of the apostles only because of the Vulgate rendering of verse 17: "Exceedingly honorable are Your friends, O God; immovably firm stands their principality"). The *Epistle* describes the Church as "the Lord's holy temple"; Christ is the corner-

stone, the apostles give foundation, and we are the building stones; larger and larger the temple becomes as time marches on. From the Epistle it is clear that the apostle feasts celebrate God's kingdom; our attention is not directed to the individual apostle as much as to the Church as such. Remember, we are fellow citizens of the saints, members of the household of God. The *Gradual* counts the multitudes won by the preaching of the apostles. The *Offertory* rejoices over the great success crowning the apostolic labors: "Their word went forth into the whole world."

3. Reflections. As we keep the feast of St. Thomas today two points seem to be particularly noteworthy: (a) there appears a certain incongruity, as remarked earlier, when its texts are set into the Advent-Christmas background. Our thoughts are oriented toward the incarnation of Christ, but the feast of St. Thomas perforce puts us into an Easter setting. I suspect that the feast is quite ancient, perhaps older than Advent and Christmas. It may date to a time having no other rhythm than the Ember Days and a monthly feast of an apostle, the latter to indicate that the Twelve are the foundation of the Church. The formation of the Church year had, as we know, several stages. And the liturgy reverences historical development.

b) Much has been written and said about Thomas' weakness of faith. We moderns are inclined to speak about the sin of Thomas, even dispute its gravity. Gregory the Great with greater profundity saw rather God's providential ways: The unbelief of Thomas has benefited us more than the faith of Magdalene. Should we not then reflect on our own failings? So often do we make the firmest resolutions to avoid this or that fault, and yet how easily we repeat it. Indeed, many of us have our apology ready: "I just can't help it, that is the way I am." In spite of God's grace, man sins.

But should we not give some thought to God's ultimate purposes too? Perhaps He has a special purpose in permitting our faults. In this life we may never quite understand why. Yet this much is clear: we need ballast for our soul's voyage through

life; else we would become lazy, easy-going. And how valuable for the soul's progress is the realization of our weakness and wretchedness! Only in the life beyond will we understand the great importance of our temptations and failings — for our personal sanctity as well as the sanctity of the Church.

4. **Advent Antiphons.** There are two fixed texts today which link us to the Advent-Christmas season:

"Do not be afraid! Five more days and the Lord will come to you!" (*Ben. Ant.*). The Church is counting the days till Christmas. The liturgy is not without features of childlike simplicity.

Today's Vespers bring the fifth "O" antiphon:

"O Rising Dawn, Radiance of the Light eternal and Sun of Justice; *come,* and enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death."

Not sacred history but nature inspires today's "O" antiphon. The sun as a symbol of Christ is one of the finest figures in Sacred Scripture and in the liturgy. And never is the metaphor more beautifully worded or more expressive of an entire season's liturgy than in our present Magnificat antiphon.

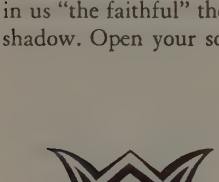
Reflections. The message is readily grasped and offers much material for meditation. Three metaphors link the Redeemer to the sun: He is the Rising Dawn; He is the Radiance of the Light eternal; He is the Sun of Justice. (a) The expression "Rising Dawn" occurs in Zachary 3:8; 6:12; more familiar, however, is its use daily in the Benedictus, *Oriens ex alto.* In spirit the aged priest Zachary beheld Christ rising as the sun "to enlighten those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death." The verse is incorporated in our antiphon. Christ is the Rising Sun that disperses spiritual darkness and death. From the sun in the sky comes light and life; from Christ the divine Sun likewise comes light and life. Remember how Jesus called Himself the light and

the life of the world. Let us summarize the points our comparison yields. The sun gives life, light, warmth, joy, health. Now imagine a place where the sun's rays do not penetrate, a dark cellar for example, wet with rottenness, darkness, death. And apply the proper deductions — spiritually.

b) The title, "Radiance of the Light eternal," as found in Hebrews 1:3, refers to the Second Divine Person (*see also* Wisdom 7:26). "Light eternal" here denotes God, particularly the First Person, while "Radiance of the Light eternal" describes the eternal and consubstantial origin of the Son from the Father. In the Credo we say: *lumen de lumine,* light from light. Thus the anthem's first phrase brought out Christ's relation to the world and to men, while this second one tells of the inner divine relationship of Christ to the Father.

c) "Sun of Justice!" These words depict the Messiah in Malachy 4:2. Christ is the Sun emitting the rays of justice, i.e., holiness and grace. What the sun does for the realm of nature, that Christ as the Sun of grace does for the kingdom of God. Which makes the closing petition obvious. We ask Christ to enlighten us by His coming. Who are they who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death? Pagans and unbelievers, sinners and atheists. But also in us "the faithful" there is still much darkness, much of death's shadow. Open your soul and let the divine light shine in.

December 22



"O King of the Gentiles and the Desired of all, You are the cornerstone that binds two (the Jews and Gentiles) into one: *Come,* and save poor man whom You fashioned out of clay."

Among the Gentiles, too, Christ was active, inspiring noble souls with clean desire for the things of God; whatever barrier existed between peoples must disappear.

Reflections. Previous antiphons stemmed from a Jewish background. The Messiah would be the fulfillment of Israelitic expectations, and Christians are the legitimate successors to God's Chosen People. In several of the antiphons there were allusions to the conversion of the Gentiles, but this sixth antiphon is the first to address the Savior as "King of the Gentiles and the Desired of all." The conversion of the pagans is mentioned in the psalms and in some of the prophets. The title, "King of the (Gentile) nations" can be found in Jeremias 10:7; Aggeus 2:8 is the source of the words, "the Desired of all (nations shall come)." The Messiah is called "Cornerstone" on the basis of several Biblical texts, e.g., Is. 28:16: "Behold, I will lay a stone as the foundation of Sion, a tested stone, a cornerstone precious and firmly set; if one believes, he will not be shaken." Christ on occasion called Himself the cornerstone (Mt. 21:42), indicating that He is the foundation, the spiritual support and mainstay of the Church.

In our anthem, however, the clause that follows indicates a function with reference to the Gentiles; the Messiah will be the cornerstone uniting Jew and Gentile. This thought is Pauline; Eph. 2:14 calls Christ the peace-maker between Jew and Gentile. There had been strict demarcation, but now the wall of partition falls: "There is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither bond nor free; there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:29).

The petition again is positive: "Save (*salva*) man whom You fashioned out of clay." This inclusion of the pagan world with its spiritual and ethical poverty is an appeal to God's pity; man is desperately in need of grace, without it salvation is impossible. The antiphon should provoke enthusiasm for the conversion of pagans. Try to realize how ardently Christ desires that we carry the gospel to non-Catholics; to all of us, directly or indirectly, His apostolic commission is addressed. Each one of us can at least pray for the conversion of those still ignorant of Christ. May *Thy kingdom come* also to our pagan fellowmen!

December 23

Now all is fulfilled

It is the day before the Holy Night; expectation turns into joy at the certainty of imminent fulfillment. As if drawing a joyful breath after long suspense the Church prays at sunrise: "Behold, all things spoken by the angel of the Virgin Mary are now fulfilled." How humanly sensitive the liturgy is! After weeks of intense longing, our souls are relieved by the quiet certainty of fulfillment.

The last "O" antiphon is sung at Vespers:

"O Emmanuel (God with us), our King and Lawgiver, the Expected of nations and their Savior: *Come*, and save us, O Lord our God!"

In previous antiphons our cry was directed to the Messiah as He manifested Himself to the Chosen People, to the Gentiles, and in nature; now He is addressed in person and asked to remain with us as Emmanuel.

Reflections. Reading this final antiphon gives the feeling that a climax has indeed come. The very term Emmanuel, God with us, reveals the kindly, human heart of Jesus — He wants to be one of us, a Child of man, with all our human weakness and suffering; He wants to experience how hard it is to be man. He wants to remain with us to the end of time, He wants to dwell within us, He wants to make us share His nature.

Besides this main title, the Savior is invoked by four other names. King and Lawgiver are common enough, and the combination is found in Isaias (32:22), "The Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King. He will save us." This is a joyous expression of faith and confidence. Christ functions in all these roles for our benefit. Whatever a lawgiver like

Moses, a judge like Samuel, a king like David, accomplished for the good and glory of their people, that and far more the expected Savior will accomplish for us.

But we must be mindful of our obligations to One who holds these titles; if He is Lawgiver, we must accept and obey His Law. Think of the Sermon on the Mount — how Jesus perfected and spiritualized the Law of Moses. Into the concept of Law He put love, purity, and perfection. If He is King, we must accord Him due obedience and submission: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord. . . . Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ."

The Messiah is next hailed as the expectation of the Gentiles and their Savior. Remember Jacob's dying words, "The sceptre will not pass from Judah, nor a ruler from his thigh, till He comes that is to be sent. He is the expectation of the nations" (Gen. 49:10). The longing of the Gentiles should serve as an incentive to a livelier appreciation of treasures we already possess. The antiphon petitions: "*Come,* and save us!" In other words: King, let me be Your vassal; Lawgiver, let me be Your servant; Expected Savior, let my longing be fulfilled in You; heal my body and soul unto eternal life. Our song closes with the words: O Lord our God! It is a phrase summarizing all the names and titles used in the seven antiphons. May our hearts be always so disposed as to use the invocation sincerely, confidently.

December 24

THE VIGIL OF CHRISTMAS

This day you shall know that the Lord is coming

1. **Christmas Eve** holds a very unique position among vigils. Usually a vigil is an anticipated night-watch. However, for December 24 this is not the case since the real night-watch for Christmas (lately also at Easter) has been retained, the Midnight Mass being the Mass of the Vigil. Christmas Eve is no vigil in the old-Roman sense, rather it is a fore-feast after the Greek

style, viz., a Sacrifice celebrated on the previous day after None. The day bears only a trace of penitential atmosphere with much joyous expectation. Emotions run high — undoubtedly stimulated by the popular custom of exchanging Christmas gifts. And most families have their own observances, customs that should be preserved from generation to generation.

The liturgical texts express wholehearted confidence in the coming of the Redeemer. A scene and an episode are used to good advantage. The scene is that of the sealed heavenly gate. When our first parents were driven out of paradise, its door was closed, guarded by a cherub and the flaming sword. It would remain for the Messiah to open that door and enter. Today we stand before this door expectantly. And on our lips is the day's very appropriately chosen theme song, Psalm 23:

> Lift up your gates, ye princes,
> and open wide, ye eternal gates;
> the King of majesty will enter in.

The episode is narrated in the Gospel. Joseph's doubts regarding Mary's Motherhood are completely dispelled by the angel.

2. Divine Office. Today, and certainly on the coming feasts, the devout Catholic will recite the Divine Office with the Church, at least some of the more important Hours. Matins today is our final Advent prayer, its invitatory formulating clearly the vigil's key message: "This day you shall know that the Lord is coming, and tomorrow you shall see His glory." Our hearts are assured; certainly He will come on the morrow in glory and power. The psalms are ferial; the lessons, a simple homily by St. Jerome on the Gospel. The holy doctor explains why Jesus was conceived by a virgin after rather than before betrothal.

The responsories repeat the vigil's primary message, a repetition that becomes deeply impressive:

> Sanctify yourselves today and be prepared,
> for tomorrow you shall see
> the majesty of God amongst you. . .

This day you shall know that the Lord is coming,
and tomorrow you shall see His glory.

Remain firm in your confidence,
you will see the Lord's help coming upon you!
O Judea and Jerusalem, do not be afraid:
tomorrow you will go forth,
and the Lord will be with you, alleluia.
Sanctify yourselves, O Children of Israel, and be ready.

Sanctify yourselves, O Children of Israel, says the Lord,
for tomorrow the Lord will come down and remove all sickness from you.
Tomorrow the iniquity of the earth will be blotted out;
and the Savior of the world will rule over us.

With Lauds at early morning the liturgy becomes more solemn. In the rising sun the Church sees the Savior's advent: "As the sun, so shall the Savior of the world arise; and He shall descend into the womb of the Virgin as rain upon the grass, alleluia."

The vigil of Christmas has its own proper solemnity at Prime in the announcement of Christ's Birthday. In some European monasteries the chanter, vested in alb and violet cope, steps into the middle of the choir, accompanied by ministers with candles and censer. He incenses the Martyrology on the violet-covered lectern, and after announcing the date begins to sing. All stand with heads uncovered, as at the Gospel. At the phrase, "in Bethlehem," all kneel; and at the words, "the birth of our Lord," all prostrate for the first adoration of the Son of God become Man. The passage begins with the fixation of the date according to ancient computation:

In the year 5199 since the creation of the world,
when God made heaven and earth;

in the year 2759 since the flood;

in the year 2015 since Abraham's birth;

in the year 1510 since the exodus of the people of Israel from Egypt under the guidance of Moses;

in the year 1032 since David was anointed king;

in the 65th week of years according to Daniel's prophecy;

in the 194th Olympiad, in the year 732 after the building of Rome;

in the 42nd year of the reign of Octavian Augustus, when there was peace in the whole world;

in the 6th era of the world's history;

Jesus Christ, eternal God and Son of the eternal Father, desired to sanctify the world by His gracious coming.

He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, and now after nine months (*all kneel*)

He is born at Bethlehem in the tribe of Judah as Man from the Virgin Mary.

THE BIRTH OF OUR LORD JESUS IN THE FLESH.

Thereupon all rise again and the Martyrology is continued in the usual manner by the lector.

During the day these antiphons serve as our ejaculations:

Prime: O Judea and Jerusalem, be not afraid: tomorrow you shall go forth and the Lord will be with you, alleluia.

Terce: This day you shall know that the Lord is coming, and tomorrow you shall see His glory.

Sext: The Lord shall come; run to meet Him, saying: It is the great beginning, and of His reign there shall be no end: God, the Mighty, the Ruler, the Prince of Peace, alleluia.

None: Tomorrow salvation shall be yours, says the Lord God of hosts.

3. Holy Mass (Hodie scietis). A holy and confident expectation is the formulary's foremost characteristic. The *Introit* is identical with the invitatory at Matins; both actually have the same function, to introduce the ensuing drama. Psalm 23 (in its extended

form) brings us again before the sealed gates: "Lift up your gates, ye princes. . . ." The door of the church symbolizes these gates. The *Oration* tells how God gladdens us yearly with the expectation of redemption, while we petition for the privilege of welcoming Him at the parousia as our Judge whom we now joyfully greet as Savior. Another venerable relic indicating early Christian yearning for Christ's Second Advent.

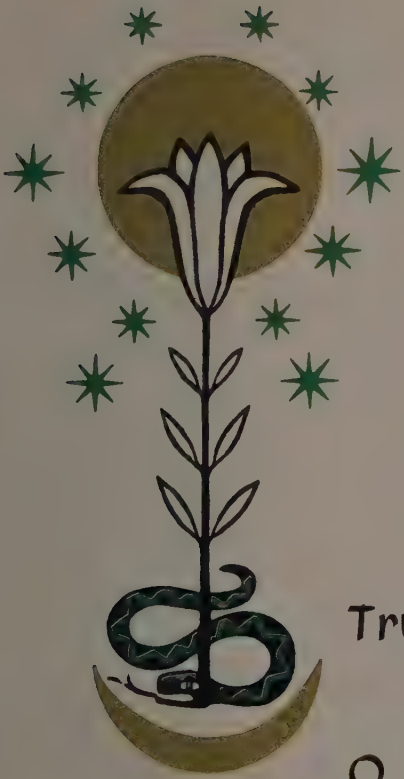
The *Epistle* marks a definite advance in the Advent revelation; the messianic picture has now become quite distinct and clear. During the past month the liturgy added line to line in sketching the portrait of the coming Lord (it is a basic principle of the liturgy to proceed gradually). In the first week we saw the Messiah as if wrapped in darkness and mist; week by week the mist dispersed and the picture became clearer, while today the Church speaks in strictly dogmatic terms; with reference to His human nature the Messiah is born of Mary the Virgin, with reference to His divine nature He is the eternal Son of God. "The gospel which God foretold by His prophets (in Advent especially through Isaias) in the Sacred Scriptures concerning His Son (the messianic message so far). According to the flesh (in His human nature) He hailed from the lineage of David; according to the spirit of sanctification (in His divine nature) He was by the resurrection from the dead proven to be the mighty Son of God, Jesus Christ our Lord. . . ." The close bond between Advent, Christmas, and Easter could hardly be more admirably expressed.

The *Gradual* repeats the Introit, and, employing Psalm 79, voices our last Advent plea. The *Gospel* recounts the last recorded episode before the Savior's birth. Joseph's painful doubts also served an Advent purpose, a trial ending with the angel's message that Mary's Child was God's own Son and our Savior. From the lips of Mother Church we hear that magnificent message: "What is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. She shall bring forth a Son, and you shall call His Name Jesus (i.e., Savior), for He shall save His people from their sins." Here we have Advent's final revelation.

On approaching the altar at the *Offertory,* we again bid the closed gates to open, for behind them (the altar) our Savior is standing. In the *Secret* we express our joy over Christ's birth anticipated in today's vigil. At the *Communion* we feel certain about "the revelation of the glory of the Lord." And again the Church sings Psalm 23 (according to the ancient, full form); the heavenly princes are opening the gates. In the *Postcommunion* we ask that our celebration of Christ's nativity may enable us to breathe again (*respirare*), a celebration that takes on mystical reality because of the holy Eucharist.

4. Vespers this evening belong to and introduce the feast of Christmas. Desire and expectation have given way to the joyous realization that now Christ is ours. Hearts are at rest and majestic calm seems to rest upon the antiphons: "The King of peace is exalted, and the whole world desires to see His face." "The King of peace is exalted over all the kings of the entire earth." We may ask, what does this "being exalted" mean? Did not His incarnation rather imply a humiliation? The liturgy takes a full view and sees the entire work of redemption, surely a glorification of Christ (the parousia approach). Next a glance at the King's Mother. "Mary's days were accomplished that she should bring forth her firstborn Son." In her footsteps we go down to Bethlehem.

Then we raise our eyes to God's eschatological kingdom and hear the goodly promise: "Know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh; amen I say unto you, it shall not be delayed." "Lift up your heads, for behold your redemption is nigh." The *Chapter* leans heavily upon the Greek Epiphany liturgy (which originally included the Nativity): *"Apparuit* — There has appeared the loving-kindness and goodness of God our Savior." No less dramatic is the Church's song at sundown: "When the sun has risen in the heavens, you will see the King of kings proceeding from the Father, as a bridegroom from his chamber" (*Magn. Ant.*). With the Collect from the third Mass on Christmas Day, Vespers come to an end.



True beauty
is yours
O Mary!
The stain of original sin
has never marred you ✚

THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

Before treating in detail the liturgy of Christmas, let us make a brief survey of the whole approaching festal period. The two primary liturgical seasons of the Church year have a similar over-all structure; each ascends through a period of preparation, continues upon a plateau of festive celebrations, and then returns to normal with a gentle afterglow. Advent is the period preparatory to the Christmas-Epiphany cycle. Looking back over the weeks just ending, one marvels at the vast amount of poetry, symbol, and drama here synthesized by the Church. We purposely quoted a considerable number of liturgical texts giving chants and lessons in the vernacular that the richness of the Advent liturgy might become better known. No other portion of the Church year, we may safely assert, contains such a lavish variety of hymns, versicles, and songs. As from a horn of plenty the liturgy pours out upon us her inexhaustible treasures.

Harmoniously there now follows as the natural sequel to Advent the feast of Christmas. The two major festive cycles noted above come to a double climax in two principal feasts upon which each cycle rests as upon a bridge with two piers. For the winter cycle these feasts are Christmas and Epiphany; for the spring cycle Easter and Pentecost. Between the two pairs of feasts there is one notable difference; Pentecost is an organic continuation of Easter's work of redemption, whereas Christmas and Epiphany repeat the same mystery.

Why there should be such repetition history alone can explain; for Christmas is the Western and Epiphany the Eastern commemoration of the incarnation, with both West and East borrowing from each other. Hence the two observances form a venerable monument to the primitive unity and harmony of spirit in the Eastern and Western Churches, a spirit we again hope and pray for after a thousand years of separation. In the light of the historical fact that Christmas and Epiphany duplicate each other, many obscurities vanish and difficulties are resolved. For us Occidentals Christmas will always seem more important, even

though Epiphany enjoys a higher rank. Christmas is and will remain *our* big feast, with Epiphany somewhat on the fringe of things.

After four weeks of holy longing, Christmas comes as the fulfillment of our wishes, even though we must admit that ideologically the bond between Epiphany and Advent is more firm and immediate. Simply examine the texts of the Christmas vigil; again and again it is: Tomorrow the guilt of sin will be blotted out. Christmas, therefore, is a redemption feast. On the other hand, the glorious theme of the King's coming, so prominent through all of Advent, is only fulfilled with Epiphany.

Yet Christmas and Epiphany do more than repeat each other. The Western Church assimilated the Eastern Nativity liturgy with its peculiar emphases and through a process of independent development her own approach was widened and wonderfully enriched. To the narrow historical aspect of Christ's birth was added the timeless perspective proper to Christ's kingdom. In the course of centuries the two separate feasts of Christ's nativity became two distinct celebrations, intrinsically related but each having its own proper significance. The net result, then, bears a remarkable similarity to what we have in the Easter cycle. At Easter the sun, a symbol of Christ's resurrection, rises and brilliantly illumines the world; on Pentecost it stands high in the sky and by its warmth induces life and growth.

Similarly at Christmas, the Light of the Holy Night illumines the plains of Bethlehem, while on Epiphany "the glory of the Lord" shines high over the city Jerusalem. At Christmas we are born with, and are reborn in, Christ our Brother; on Epiphany Christ celebrates His wedding feast with the Church and individual souls. At Christmas "Christ is born"; the occasion resembles an intimate family feast at which only a few — Mary and the shepherds — take part. But on Epiphany "Christ appears to us," i.e., He manifests Himself to the whole world. The historical events as the nativity, the adoration of the Magi, the baptism, etc., serve only as witnesses to prove the blessed fact that the God-Man is the world's Redeemer.

The two feasts, Christmas and Epiphany, furthermore show similarity and dissimilarity to each other in regard to the days immediately preceding and following. Christmas retains a vigil, which we have included in Advent, and an octave which permits the celebration of other feasts such as St. Thomas and St. Sylvester; and its eighth day commemorates the circumcision of Jesus, a feast in its own right. Peculiar to Christmas, moreover, are the three feasts following in immediate sequence, St. Stephen, St. John, and the Holy Innocents; while the Sunday within the octave of Christmas originally was transitional to Epiphany.

Until 1955 Epiphany, too, had a vigil and a privileged octave that did not permit lesser feasts — aids making possible a deep and undisturbed penetration of the mystery itself. Pope Benedict XV placed the feast of the Holy Family on the Sunday within the octave, necessitating the transfer of the older and more meaningful Mass of the Sunday to a weekday. These various infringements on liturgical order and propriety may still be remedied as scholars and ecclesiastics become more familiar with and sympathetic to matters liturgical.

Two Approaches — A Meditation. The mystery at Bethlehem may be viewed in the light of its visible externals or in its invisible supernatural implications. For many years now increasing stress has been placed on its human or visible aspects. How beautiful a scene! There in a clean, white manger lies the Infant of Bethlehem, sweet and lovely! We see only the stable, the crib, a Babe surrounded by animals and cherished by a radiantly beautiful Mother. So holy a simplicity banishes distractions. Everything is so touchingly serene that even those outside the faith are emotionally stirred.

Good as such a human approach may be, it does not bring out the message Bethlehem was meant to give. There is another way of looking at the crib — with supernatural lenses aiding our eyes. The liturgy gives us this needed aid. Its texts are very little concerned with the crib or the poverty of the Child. Instead, Christ and the mysteries of the Holy Night are seen in divine perspective.

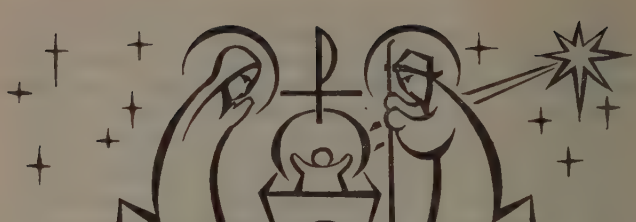
Frequently the first statement one makes on a given problem is the most significant. What is the first statement the liturgy makes on the feast of Christmas? We find it in the opening antiphon at Vespers. On first reading we may not be at all impressed. "The King of peace is exalted, and the whole world desires to see His face." To aid us get its meaning, the second antiphon repeats the idea: "The King of peace is exalted over all the kings of the entire earth."

The newborn Lord is called the "King of peace," not the Infant of Bethlehem. Should this poor, weak Child really be a king? Certainly. This Child is your King, my King. But a king may be a tyrant, cruel, unapproachable, war-minded. Christ is King of peace in a twofold way: His coming is peaceful, and He bestows peace as His gift. In external appearance He may seem poor and mean; nevertheless His is a crown of precious stones glittering so brilliantly that our eyes become blinded; and upon His shoulders rests a royal mantle studded with the stars of heaven. The universe is His throne, the earth His footstool. But all such majestic apparel He has put aside so as not to frighten us. From the crib as a throne He exercises His rule of peace.

For another reason, too, is He the King of peace. He comes to make peace between God and man, between man and man, between Jew and non-Jew; and in man himself, between body and soul, between flesh and spirit.

Our antiphon continues: "The King of peace is *exalted*." It is particularly difficult to see how this is true in Bethlehem's stable. All details point to the very opposite; for He humbled Himself even to the point of being born an infant, coming from the womb in a stable. How can human birth and in a stable be an "exaltation"? Now the liturgy is a docile disciple of the Master. Referring to His death, Jesus once said: "The hour is come for the Son of Man to be *glorified*." His gaze was directed beyond Calvary and death, for these served only as a passage or as a means to transfigured life, to exaltation. The kernel of wheat dies and decays in order to produce the plant. Liturgy raises our sights above the stable, above the manger, for these are only the dying

grain of wheat; the final flower and fruit is the Church. Stable and manger formed the cradle for the Church; stable and manger were the seed from which the mighty tree of God's kingdom grows, the Church with all her saints, all her virtues, all her good works — and this is Christ's exaltation. Therefore the liturgy, in spite of the Infant's poverty and lowliness, sings jubilantly: "The King of peace is exalted!" For the birth of Christ is the beginning and the ultimate cause of all blessings upon earth.



THE HOLY FEAST OF CHRISTMAS

This day Christ is born,
this day the Savior has appeared;
this day angels are singing on earth,
archangels are rejoicing;
this day the just are glad and say:
Glory to God in the highest, alleluia!

Sincere Christians will prepare themselves several days in advance for the Christmas liturgy, giving time and attention to both the Breviary and Missal. All the greater feasts, in fact, call for such special preparation.

1. **The Holy Night.** (a) *Matins.* The worship of God during the night! In the ancient Church this was the normal procedure. The night was not merely for sleep but also for contemplative prayer. The vigil (night watch) or Matins was the nightly parousia prayer of expectation in the early Church, the time when she yearned for the *Oriens ex alto,* i.e., the Second Coming of the Lord. Liturgical spirit even today places the office of Matins in the night, and there are religious communities that rise in the very depth of the night to pray and sing this Hour in the name of the Church. For the faithful in general there remained (until the recent restoration of the Easter Vigil) this

one night Office of the Christmas Vigil, at least in certain places. The Christmas bells call us to the house of God long before the solemn hour of midnight, providing a wonderful opportunity of praying the Hour of Matins with the Church throughout the world.

After the solemn invitation (Invitatory), "Christ is born to us, come, let us adore!", and its associated hymn, *Jesu, Redemptor omnium*, the three night watches (nocturns) begin. The first three psalms, though differing in mood and content, are dominated by the one thought of Christ's birth. Psalm 2: From eternity begotten of the Father, in time born of Mary. Psalm 18: Like the sun, the divine Bridegroom leaves His bridal chamber and comes to us in a blaze of light (the psalm is familiar to us from Advent). Psalm 44: Divinity and humanity today celebrate their marriage in the newborn Son of God.

In the lessons Advent's prophet, Isaias, concludes his oracles. He proclaims the restoration of God's kingdom by the Messiah (first lesson); he comforts and exhorts Jerusalem (the Church) to put on her robes of glory, for the royal Bridegroom is come for the wedding feast (second and third lessons).

> Arise, arise, put on your garments, O Sion,
> put on the garment of your glory, Jerusalem, holy city!
>
> Arise from the dust, captive Jerusalem!
> Loosed are the bonds from your neck, captive Sion!

Exceptionally beautiful responsories full of genuine emotion give lyrical expression to the Christmas mystery. The first two are remembered for their oft-repeated *hodie*, "this day," and the third for its dramatically vivid dialog (possibly the inspiration for the nativity plays of the Middle Ages).

> This day true peace has come down to us from heaven,
> this day the heavens drip honey upon the entire world,
> this day brought the dawn of new redemption,
> of the deliverance announced of old, of eternal happiness.

Whom have you seen, O shepherds?
speak, tell us, who has appeared on earth?
A Child we saw and choirs of angels praising the Lord!
Speak, what did you see? and proclaim the birth of Christ!

The first nocturn brought the message of Jesus' birth. The second nocturn points out the gifts He brings, viz., the kingdom of God, peace, redemption, reconciliation with the Father. The psalms help give this message. Psalm 47: The City of God celebrates the birthday of her King and with festive procession gives thanks for her deliverance from the enemy. Psalm 71: A genuine Christmas-Epiphany hymn extolling the newborn Child as the King of peace and of justice, and as the Father of the poor. Psalm 84: A joyous redemption song. The lessons give a Christmas homily of Pope St. Leo I, whose powerful addresses stirred the Roman Church of the fifth century. After these readings the Church first stands in awe before the mystery of the crib, then turns and praises Mary through four responsories.

In the third nocturn the psalmody, after calmly considering God's mercy and fidelity, becomes exultingly joyous. Psalm 88 culls out God's promises to David which today find fulfillment in our Savior's birth; He is David's descendant and will reign as king forever. The two final psalms (95 and 97) bring Matins to a jubilant conclusion. Usually the third nocturn lessons explain the Gospel, of which only the initial sentence is read. Today there are three Masses and three Gospels, and each receives brief comment. The homilies are taken from three great Fathers of the Western Church, Gregory the Great, Ambrose, and Augustine; with Leo I in the second nocturn all four Latin Fathers address us during Christmas Matins.

b) *The Christmas Masses.* The feast of Christmas is distinguished by a threefold celebration of the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The old Romans here imitated a venerable custom of the Church at Jerusalem. There the Christians assembled at the Nativity Grotto in Bethlehem and consecrated the hour of the Lord's birth by the celebration of a night Mass. Thereupon they re-

turned to Jerusalem, arriving at early dawn. Nothing seemed more fitting than to spend that hour commemorating the resurrection in the church of the Resurrection, keeping Christmas with the shepherds. This was their second Mass.

On the day itself they would gather again in Jerusalem's main church for the sacred Sacrifice. Thus originated the custom of three Masses on Christmas. When the custom was adopted in Rome, the first or midnight Mass was held in Mary's church of the Crib (St. Mary Major meant Bethlehem to the Roman Christians); the second Mass was celebrated at St. Anastasia's, the Greek palace church (*anastasis* means "resurrection"); and the day's final liturgy took place at St. Peter's. From Rome the custom spread throughout the West; and when priests began to offer holy Mass daily, it became customary for every priest to celebrate three Masses on Christmas.

Three strains of thought are intertwined in each Mass formulary: (a) the manifestation of divine Light; (b) the particular time of day or night; and (c) the Gospel episode. The three Masses present a gradual intensification of the feast's theology. Something of Advent still lingers in the midnight service. There is a revelation of God's light enshrouded in majesty, bright angels hover over the earth, the Mother alone, the purest Virgin, is near the divine Child. Mankind still waits expectantly in the darkness of night.

The Christmas message expands with the second Mass celebrated *in aurora,* at dawn. The divine Light that appeared on earth under cover of night now rises like the sun, full of mighty creative power, its rays falling upon and warming our hearts with its saving energy. With the third Mass Christmas theology unfolds to its maximum, an outpouring of divine wisdom and love unto all men upon the face of the earth.

Christmas is a "light" feast, a fact that determined its position in the calendar. December twenty-fifth is not the historical anniversary of Christ's nativity (that date is unknown). The winter solstice was chosen for the feast in order to supplant and christianize the pagan festivities associated with the birth of

the sun-god (Sol Invictus). Christ is the true Sun-god who overcomes and vanquishes the darkness of hell. Hence the feast of His birth is most appropriately placed at that point of time when the sun again begins its ascent. As noted above, the "light" theme, to which Christians of a later age gave touching expression in the radiantly shining Christmas tree, is proper to all three Masses. At the midnight liturgy during the darkness of night, light symbolism has an unusual natural effectiveness; in the second Mass the rising sun becomes a figure, occasioning the Introit outburst: "A light shall shine upon us this day!" And in the third Mass the light theme finds superb expression in the Gospel: "The Light shines in darkness . . . that was the true Light."

c) *The Midnight Mass* (*Dominus dixit*). The fundamental message of today's first Mass is: Christ, the Child of Bethlehem, born of the Virgin Mary, is God's true Son, begotten from eternity. Or more briefly, the eternal and temporal birth of the Lord. In union with all Christendom we are gathered in the Roman basilica of St. Mary Major close to the crypt behind the altar representing the cave of Bethlehem. The *Introit* has its counterpart in the *Gospel*. The latter tells us: "She (Mary) brought forth her firstborn Son"; while the former reveals His eternal origin: "The Lord (God the Father) said to Me: Thou art My Son; on this day (of eternity) have I begotten Thee (of My very being)!"

The *Gloria* is particularly appropriate because it is a Christmas hymn, a fact that would become more evident if it were entirely suppressed during Advent. The *Oration* acknowledges God as the source for the light of faith, and prays for its full enjoyment in the vision of heaven. The bright glory of the angels and the enlightenment given the Church are but weak types of the infinite ocean of divine light upon which we hope to gaze in heaven. Note how our prayer service ascended from the night of Advent (the *Kyrie*) to heaven's brightest splendor.

Now the apostle of the Gentiles addresses us in the *Epistle*; he experienced as few others how the darkness of Advent can be dispelled by the glory of Christmas; it was the incarnate Redeem-

er who Himself appeared to Paul before Damascus, and after that moment it was no longer night in his soul. As a result he lived a life resplendent with light, an example he now heartily recommends.

Actually the principal topic in the Epistle is grace, grace as it came to us through the Person of Christ, the source of salvation for all mankind; grace, as it acts in the role of a master educator teaching us to live soberly, justly, godly; grace, that floods us with supernatural hope and desire for the Lord's return. Epistle and Gospel speak of the Man Christ; placed between the two, the *Gradual* reveals His heavenly origin. There follows the climax to the preparatory portion of the Mass, the incomparably beautiful *Gospel* recounting the birth of Jesus. The shepherds are keeping night watch (and we, too, for the whole service is a night watch, a *vigilia*); a heavenly splendor floods in upon them and upon us at the appearance of the angel.

The *Offertory,* familiar to us from Matins, echoes the Gospel; angels from heaven stand about the crib rejoicing; the earth, too, still wrapped in darkness, trembles with joy. With these sentiments we approach the altar; there will be mutual giving on this Feast of Gifts. In the nativity the *Secret* sees a wonderful exchange: God became Man that man might become God-like. It is time now for the mystery commemorated to become reality in the Sacrifice as Christ is born to us anew, and we are reborn in Him. While at the Lord's Table we hear of the eternal birth of our divine High Priest, a revelation of our own rebirth in Him (Ps. 109, *Comm.*).

2. At Dawn. (a) *Lauds.* The Church's early-morning prayer, which follows immediately upon the Midnight Mass, is actually the introduction to the day's second Mass at dawn. Lauds and Mass belong together, for the Mass is Eucharistic praise (Lauds); hence, Psalm 92 for the Introit. The antiphons at Lauds, some of which are cast in question and answer form, dramatize the experience of the shepherds during the Holy Night.

b) *The Mass of the Shepherds* (*Lux fulgebit*). "At dawn" gives the time and the symbolism of the second Mass. Easily

seen in the hour and the formulary are the two lead ideas of the rising sun and the shepherds' visit to the crib. All about us is light as amazed we behold the newborn King of the world, *Lux fulgebit hodie super nos* (*Intr.*; the whole of Psalm 92 belongs here with its background of the mythical, primeval flood). The *Oration* is a glorious "light" prayer: "Bathed in the new light of Thy Word made flesh" we ask that the light of faith influence our works. Immediately the *Epistle* answers our petition; the loving, incarnate Savior is the Light that was first infused into us at baptism.

In the *Gradual* we praise our Savior who "comes to enlighten us"; it all is "wonderful in our eyes," the work of the Lord who is King (*All.*). Accompanying the shepherds we joyfully approach the crib (*Gosp.*). In the Sacrifice we ourselves will be the shepherds finding the newborn King; and with them we will lay our gifts (there is good theology in the pictures representing the shepherds with gifts in their hands) before the altar; then filled with God's return Gifts we depart. In the *Communion* the newborn King enters His Church and the soul, fulfillling perfectly our Advent expectation: "Rejoice, daughter Sion! shout for joy, daughter Jerusalem! Behold, your King comes, the Holy One, the Savior of the world." Truly a Mass suffused with and diffusing light, one of the most beautiful formularies in the Missal.

3. The Feast's Solemn Daytime Liturgy. (a) *The Third Mass* (*Puer natus est*). For the feast's principal liturgical service the station church formerly was St. Peter's. The text shows reason for the choice. St. Peter's, to the Christians of Rome, was the symbol of Christ's dominion over the pagan world. This is the main message of the Mass: the universal sovereignty of Christ Jesus our Lord. In the *Introit* we hail the little Babe in the crib as the *Imperator* (in the old Roman sense) of the world, "upon whose shoulders the government rests." In Psalm 97, remembered from Matins, we proclaim how "The Lord has made known His salvation, He has revealed His justice in the sight of the Gen-

tiles. . . . All the ends of the earth now behold the salvation of our God."

The *Collect* requests that "the new birth" shake off the "old yoke of sin and set us free." The Mass-theme is excellently developed in the *Epistle* as St. Paul sketches for us the picture of Christ as Ruler of the universe "whom He (God the Father) appointed Heir and Lord of the world, a world which was also created through Him. As the brightness and the glory of the Father, as the figure of His divine substance, the Son upholds and preserves all things by His almighty word . . . He now sits at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. To the Son the Father says: Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a just sceptre is the sceptre of Your Kingdom. . . ."

In the *Alleluia* verse rays of light herald St. John's Gospel of Light and Life: "We have been en-*light*-ened by this sacred day"; while high in the sky the sun, symbolizing the world's Redeemer, beams down its cheerful light, *Hodie descendit lux magna super terram.* Now the *Gospel.* How tremendously impressive is St. John's Prolog on Christmas! The eternal Logos is the divine Light that shines into the darkness of the world; and the world will not grasp It! Upon us, God's children, however, It shines in fullest power; and "we see His glory, glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father."

The *Offertory* develops the major theme of the Mass, Christ's universal sovereignty: "Yours are the heavens and Yours the earth; righteousness and justice are the supports for Your throne." In approaching the altar we approach Christ's throne, and a song praising the power of our Ruler is on our lips. The *Secret* bears the stamp of classical form: Through the new birth of His Son may God make holy our gifts and purify us from the stain of sin. Thus the gifts we offer become identified with ourselves. The Introit Psalm is used again at the *Communion*: "All the ends of the earth now (in the Eucharist) see the salvation of our God" (Ps. 97). Upon the tremendous truth, "The newborn Savior is the author of our divine generation," the *Postcommunion* bases

our petition that "He be the donor of our immortality." The *Last Gospel*, with its account of the Magi's visit, turns our attention already toward Epiphany.

Thus we find in the Christmas Masses a gradual expansion of three major ideas:

night	dawn	midday sun
Mary alone	the shepherds (a few chosen ones)	the whole world
the Savior	our Savior	Savior of the world

b) Vespers bring the feast proper to a close. The psalms and antiphons of second Vespers, however, will continue throughout the octave. What thoughts are dominant? I find two: (1) *the Person of Christ,* "begotten in the bosom of the Father before the day-star . . . the Light risen in the darkness, the merciful and just Lord." Fulfilled is the promise made to David that a descendant of his would occupy the royal throne (Psalm 131; for the same reason Psalm 88 occurs at Matins).

2) *The Redemption.* Christmas is a redemption feast: "He has sent redemption to His people; He has established His covenant forever . . . with the Lord there is mercy and plentiful redemption." Here the sombre *De profundis* strikes us as very strange. We are accustomed to using it as a chant for the dead, and now it appears on Christmas day! Evidently the verse, "With the Lord there is plentiful redemption," offers good reason for its choice. Nevertheless, we must try to see whether the whole psalm cannot be related organically to the feast. The Divine Office is the prayer of the Mystical Christ. This Christ is now raising His voice from the depths into which He descended "because of us men"; He cries out as the little Child from the crib, He calls from the pit of human misery in the name of unredeemed humanity: "Out of the depths I cry to Thee, O Lord!"

The *Magnificat antiphon* summarizes the feast beautifully:

> This day Christ was born,
> this day the Savior has appeared;

this day the angels are singing on earth,
the archangels are rejoicing;
this day the just exult and sing:
Glory to God in the highest, alleluia!

4. Saints on December 25. St. Anastasia is commemorated in the second Mass. Of her the Martyrology says: "The day of St. Anastasia's death. She lived at the time of Emperor Diocletian, was subjected to hard and cruel treatment from her husband Publius, while comfort and encouragement came from the Christian confessor Chrysogonus. Later she was imprisoned for a long time by the prefect Florus in Illyria. Finally she was bound hand and foot to pillars and a fire lit round about her. Thus she died a martyr's death. It took place on the island of Palmaria."

Christmas Martyrs: "At Nicomedia (in Asia Minor) the memory of the death of many thousands of martyrs. On the day of Christ's birth they had assembled for the celebration of the Eucharist. The Emperor Diocletian ordered the doors of the church closed and fuel heaped up round about. Before the entrance was placed a tripod with incense, and a crier announced: Whoever wants to escape death by fire step out and offer incense to Jupiter. The answer was unanimous, all preferred to die for Christ. Immediately the fatal fire was lit. Thus they had the good fortune to be born for heaven on the very day on which Christ desired to be born on earth as its Redeemer" (*Martyrology*).

5. Night and Birth in God's Plan. A Meditation. Great feats in human affairs — war, industry, politics — usually transpire by day; and the world loves to hold its festivities under a shining sun. But the Church from the beginning preferred the solemn stillness of the night, and in ancient times celebrated all her feasts while the world was sleeping. She remembered how her Master spent nights in prayer; and night, too, symbolized her estrangement from the world, her longing for the parousia. Her longest prayer to this very day is her nightly prayer, Matins.

The great events of redemption, she recalls, happened in darkness, away from the eyes of the curious. Was not already the great type of messianic redemption, Israel's deliverance from Egypt, the death of the firstborn, the slaying and eating of the Passover lamb, a true "holy night"? Christ instituted the mystery of His love, the holy Eucharist, in the evening — the shades of night had already fallen. Indeed, He died in daytime, yet "the sun was darkened" to make it resemble night. On the third day He arose, but "it was still dark" when the women found the empty tomb. And when He was born into the world, He did not choose the day, but the quiet night. The liturgy expresses it very beautifully: "While all things were in deep silence and the night was in the midst of her course, Thy almighty Word, O Lord, came from heaven, from Thy royal throne."

As Christians became more lax, the night services gradually fell into disuse. One night only was retained with all its charm, the holy night of Christmas. If this holy night is so thrilling to individuals who have but a superficial acquaintance with Christianity, what should it mean to the devout who can appreciate the rich content and sacred overtones in the Church's liturgy! The night resounds with sacred song as we pray Matins. The prophets rise and speak, and we witness the fulfillment of their oracles. The texts of the Midnight Mass widen the vista of our vision beyond the birth at Bethlehem to another birth in the night of eternity, and to a third birth that touches each participant.

The birth in the night of eternity. The Church draws back the curtains to eternity, revealing the night before any "morning star" had shone. In this eternal night before time began the Second Divine Person came forth from the bosom of the Father. "God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God." The human mind, weak and finite, stands aghast before this unfathomable mystery: Son of God begotten of the Father before all time! Nevertheless, this eternity now draws mysteriously near, for in the holy Eucharist the eternal Son comes to us and eternity blends with time. Yes, this night fills us with awe and

holy fear as it reveals the birth of God's Son in the timeless night of eternity.

Now, this revelation serves as a prelude to a birth on a well-known night in the calendar of time, the nativity we commemorate today. Mother Church takes us by the hand and leads us to the stable of Bethlehem. It is midnight, and she shows us the newborn Babe, the King of peace; she shows us the Virgin Mother in her first maternal bliss. But we are at Mass, the holy action that is more than a mere figure and remembrance of Bethlehem's sacred scene. That is the mystery of the Midnight liturgy — Jesus our King, Jesus the eternally begotten Son of God, again becomes present as the Newborn, chooses our heart for His crib, and allows us to share Mary's motherly joy.

But what is the third birth proper to our holy night? The first was the birth in the night of eternity; the second, the birth in time at Bethlehem, both of which are made present here and now on our altar. The third is our spiritual birth through grace. Nothing in Christmas moves our hearts more profoundly than this: Christ became Man to make us His brothers — that, reborn, we might be children of God even as He is. It is now the night of our rebirth. Easter and baptism are indeed inseparable; but year after year the holy night of Christ's nativity is the night of our spiritual rebirth.

Again we become new children of God after having cried to heaven, unredeemed during the long weeks of Advent. Now in the holy Sacrifice, as you make your heart a crib, the Church not only speaks of Christ as she prays, "In the brightness of My sanctity before the morning star have I begotten Thee." She is also speaking of *you*: In the night of eternity *you* were chosen by the Father; in the holy night of our Savior's birth *you* were remembered in the heart of God's newborn Son and made His brother and sister; and now the Father draws *you* to His loving heart: With My Son, born in the stable, you have become My dearest child. With Jesus you are celebrating a birthday, reborn unto God in the holiest of nights.

THE RETINUE OF THE KING

How did the three feasts, St. Stephen, St. John the Evangelist, and Holy Innocents, receive the privileged place in the liturgy immediately after Christmas? An arrangement like this is, indeed, a unique occurrence in the Church year. Liturgical history supplies an answer, even though it does not satisfy us completely. The feasts had been observed on these dates prior to the time Christmas was placed on December 25, and originally had no connection with it. We are concerned, however, with the sequence at present, and now the relationship with Christmas is very intimate. St. Bernard observed how three types of sanctity paid homage to the newborn King, viz., a martyr in will and in deed (Stephen), a martyr in will only (John), and martyrs in deed only (Holy Innocents). But such medieval exegesis is far too forced.

What would have been the solution during a more liturgically-minded age? The feasts of the saints show forth the Church. The perfection of holiness that she personifies in the highest degree is reflected in the various classes of saints. What, then, was the ancient ideal of Christian holiness? To meet the coming Lord with the palm of martyrdom and the white robe of virginity. Here we have the true idea underlying our three feasts. The Church clothes herself in the manner that seems most appropriate for the reception of the great King. It is described in the Apocalypse: "clothed with white robes and with palms in their hands." Thus we go to meet the Lord on the first day as martyrs, on the second as virgins, and on the third as virgin-martyrs. On Christmas the Lamb appeared on the mystical mount of Sion, while on the three following days the Church forms the inmost circle about the Lamb, composed of those who "sing a new song before the throne." Such is the Christmas *mysterium* that needs four days to unfold.

With this correct understanding of the three feasts, it becomes easier to draw fruit from their liturgy. Although we are poor, sinful men, through grace we have become godlike and holy; and

joined to the Church, we, like Stephen or John or the Holy Innocents, can greet the King; yes, we can join the glorious multitude of the 144,000 "who follow the Lamb wherever He goes."

Another approach. During Advent we looked forward to and yearned for the kingdom of God. Now at Christmas we ought solemnly witness and experience its presence. Joyfully and confidently the liturgical texts tell of the advent of Christ and His kingdom. The transition from expectation to fulfillment is wrought with subtle perfection. According to the liturgy, therefore, Christmas marks the establishment of God's kingdom upon earth. This observation should help us evaluate the three feasts that follow the Nativity. At Bethlehem God's kingdom came into existence. But how did it fare? Who were responsible for its extension? And what aided most in its development?

The feast of St. Stephen contributes one very important answer. In order to flourish, God's kingdom requires martyrs. In the Gospel Christ points to a whole list of divinely-commissioned men, from Abel down to the present, who were put to death. It is ever the same with God's kingdom on earth. The feast of St. John gives further information on what is needed. For membership there are two requirements: God's call and man's wholehearted compliance. John heads the list of Christ's friends, those who will be called "great in the kingdom of heaven." The Holy Innocents, too, by liturgical standards are Christian heroes. Thus as the King proceeds, He is not alone; He is followed by the glorious retinue of His kingdom.

December 26

ST. STEPHEN, Protomartyr

In the blood of the holy Levite Stephen "the Church dedicates the first-fruits of martyrdom" to the King of martyrs.

The feast of St. Stephen can be considered either with reference to the Christmas mystery or independently by itself. The Mass exemplifies the latter; there is no mention of Christmas. Yet Christian sensitivity as well as the Hours of Office again and again relate one to the other.

1. Stephen and Christmas. In the invitatory of Matins the Church sees Stephen receiving his crown from the Infant of Bethlehem: "Christ, the Newborn, today crowned Stephen. Come, let us adore Him!" Never has the relationship of the feast of St. Stephen to that of Christmas been more beautifully developed than in the festal sermon of the Bishop St. Fulgentius (d. 533), read today at Matins:

"Yesterday, my dear brethren, we celebrated the birth in time of our timeless King; today we celebrate the triumphant sufferings of a soldier. Yesterday our King, clothed in a robe of flesh, came forth from a virginal womb and deigned to visit this earth; today a soldier, leaving the tabernacle of the body, departs as

a conqueror for heaven. The former, preserving the majesty of divinity, assumed the lowly form of human nature and entered this world to do battle; the latter, laying aside corruptible bodily trappings, has ascended to reign unceasingly in the palaces of heaven. The one descended, veiled in flesh; the other ascended, laureled in blood.

"Yesterday the angels sang exultingly: Glory to God in the highest; today they have joyously received blessed Stephen into their midst. Yesterday Christ was wrapped for us in swaddling clothes; today blessed Stephen is clothed by Him with the stole of immortality. Yesterday the narrow crib carried the Infant Christ; today the boundless heavens receive the triumphant Stephen. Our Lord descended alone that He might make many ascend; our King has humbled Himself that He might exalt His soldiers.

"Nevertheless, dearest brethren, it is necessary that we know with what weapon blessed Stephen was armed so as to overcome Jewish savagery and merit such triumph. To obtain the crown which is signified by his name, St. Stephen was armed with charity and by it conquered all obstacles. Because of his love of God he fled not from the cruel Jews; because of his love of neighbor he prayed for those who were stoning him. In charity he corrected the erring that they would amend; in charity he prayed for his executors that they would not be punished. By the virtue of charity he conquered the fire-breathing Saul and so merited to have his persecutor on earth as companion in heaven."

2. The Feast Itself. (a) Sacred Scripture contains a stirring account of the martyrdom of our saint: "When the Jews heard these things (his defense), they were cut to the heart and gnashed their teeth at him. But he, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked steadfastly to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at God's right hand. He cried out: I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at God's right hand. At this, his opponents shouted with loud voices, they held their ears shut, and as one man ran violently upon him. They drove him out of the

city and stoned him. The witnesses placed their mantles in the care of a young man named Saul. So they stoned Stephen, but he prayed: Lord Jesus, take my spirit. Then he fell on his knees crying loudly: Lord, do not blame them for this sin. And with these words he passed away."

b) Holy Mass (*Sederunt principes*). The formulary's native simplicity increases our admiration for the vivid, dramatic manner in which the Church gives our saint his leading role. Before our eyes he dies a martyr's death; moreover, the Church unites us to him, making us share his sufferings and his glory. Three stages can here be distinguished: suffering — oblation — union with Christ. In the Foremass we seek to identify ourselves with Stephen in his passion. With him we stand before the Sanhedrin; for we too are part of a world full of temptation and struggle. We too can sincerely pray the words of the *Introit* and *Gradual*: "The wicked persecute me; help me, Lord, for Your servant is trying to keep Your commandments." Together with Stephen we lay the afflictions of life on the altar at the *Offertory* and say with him: "Lord Jesus, take my soul." Stephen shows us how to suffer.

In making our Offertory oblation we try to imitate the spirit with which our saint made his supreme oblation of self. Such full and heartfelt surrender constitutes the finest gift that can be brought to the altar. Now the Sacrifice may proceed in which the threefold oblation, that of Christ, St. Stephen, and myself, become one acceptable Sacrifice ascending to our Father in heaven.

The sacred Banquet brings us to the third stage. What eventually happened to Stephen? He was crowned, as his name indicates; to him came the glory of heavenly transfiguration. Such also is the purpose of the Mass. The sacred Banquet unites us with Christ and initiates our spiritual transfiguration. Each feast of a saint makes contact with God easier. Saints bridge the way to God.

A word or two on the remaining prayers. In the *Oration* we pray for the spirit and grace to imitate St. Stephen's love toward

enemies. The *Epistle* graphically describes the saint's martyrdom. In the *Gradual*, an echo of the Epistle, we pray for help against persecutors. The *Alleluia* verse pictures Jesus standing transfigured at the right hand of God. In the *Gospel* Christ recalls how the Jews put to death God's representatives in every period of sacred history. Stephen continued that line of martyrs; yes, he heads the great host of Christians who died for their Master. Our Offertory gifts are directed to God in the name of all His holy martyrs, including Blessed Stephen; with them we seek union and through them we wish to obtain forgiveness (*Secr.*).

c) *The Divine Office* today seems rather thin. After a feast so full of poetry and high emotion as Christmas, the Common of Martyrs appears austere and simple. Its very form, however, exemplifies classic Roman liturgy. We cannot help but note the frequent references to "crown" and "crowning" (Stephen — the *one crowned*). Read slowly the beautiful antiphons at Lauds, e.g., "The torrent of stones was dear to him; all the souls of the just follow him." With Stephen pray Psalm 62 and its pointed introduction: "My soul clings fast to Thee; because my body was stoned for Thee, my God."

December 27

ST. JOHN, Apostle and Evangelist

This is John who reclined on the Lord's breast at the Supper. O blessed Apostle, to whom were revealed heavenly secrets!
(Magn. Ant.)

1. St. John. Virgin and beloved disciple of Jesus! At the Last Supper you rested on the Master's bosom, drawing from thence His love and His deepest secrets! Therefore you now speak most touchingly to us!

Beneath the Cross St. John received the Lord's most precious legacy, His Virgin Mother. For the Church he wrote a "spiritual Gospel" in which, like an eagle (his symbol), he scales the heights. How dear to us is the Lord's farewell discourse given in the Fourth Gospel! The only prophetic book in the New Testament, the Apocalypse, the Book of the Parousia, comes from the beloved disciple. John alone of the apostles died a natural death; still he was not spared the trials and tribulations of a martyr, being thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil (see May 6) toward the end of his life (about 100) and thus "drinking Christ's chalice."

The Breviary tells this incident from his life: "When the holy evangelist was living at Ephesus and was far advanced in years, his disciples would carry him into church. Being unable to give

a lengthy sermon, he was accustomed simply to repeat the words: Children, love one another. His disciples and the brethren who were present, upon hearing these same words repeatedly, became impatient and asked: Master, why do you always say the same thing? John's reply was wholly in harmony with his heart: Because it is the Lord's commandment; and if you did nothing more, it would suffice." "Sixty-eight years after the passion and death of His Lord, he died at a ripe old age. He was buried near Ephesus" (*Martyrology*).

2. Divine Office. Tenderness and charm distinguish today's Hours of Divine Office; their burden, the apostle's innocence and love. The responsories portray varied aspects of the saint's personality: Evangelist, Beloved Disciple, apocalyptic Prophet, Virgin, Theologian, the Apostle on his Master's breast.

Jesus loved him because the excellence of his chastity
made him worthy of the greatest love.
He was a virgin when chosen by the Lord,
and he remained virginal until death.
When near to death upon the Cross,
the Lord commended His Virgin Mother
to John the virgin.

Very highly we must venerate blessed John;
for during the Last Supper he reclined
on the breast of the Lord.
And to his virginal care Christ entrusted His Virgin
Mother while on the Cross.
He, a virgin, was selected by the Lord
and loved more than the others.

The lessons of the first nocturn, giving the beginning of St. John's First Epistle, reveal a soul overflowing with love (the beginning represents the whole). In the third nocturn St. Augustine sees in the two apostles, Peter and John, figures of the earthly and the heavenly Church:

"The Church is familiar with two types of life, both having

been revealed and commended to her by God. The one exists through faith, the other through vision; the one implies a time of pilgrimage, the other provides an eternal home; the one means labor, the other brings rest; the one is an exile, the other a fatherland; the one calls for acts of virtue, the other gives the reward of beatitude; the one turns away from evil and does good, the other has no evil to turn away from because it knows and enjoys only the good; the one struggles with the enemy, the other reigns with no foe about. The one helps the needy, where the other is there are no needy; the one forgives insults that its own may be forgiven, the other suffers nothing that need be forgiven and does nothing that calls for forgiveness. The one is scourged by visitations that good fortune may not occasion pride, the other possesses the fullness of grace, is devoid of all evil and clings to the highest Good without the least leaning to self-exaltation. The one life is good, yet full of misery; while the other is better, replete with happiness.

"The former is typified by the apostle Peter, the latter by John. The former will continue to the end of the world and then cease, but the latter's fulfillment is postponed to the end of time and in the future world will know no end. Therefore to Peter it was said: Follow Me! But to John: If I should will that he remain thus till I come, what is it to you? Now what do these words mean? As far as I can see and understand, they mean: you follow Me, imitating Me and enduring transitory sufferings; while he should remain till I make My everlasting appearance, bestowing rewards."

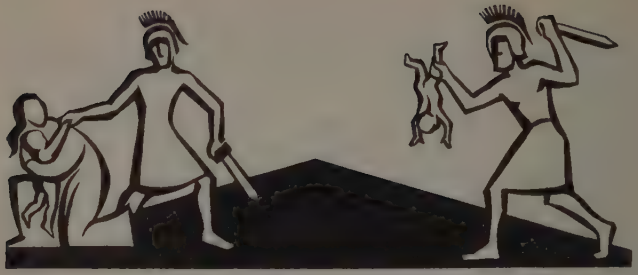
3. Holy Mass (In medio). The formulary is somewhat lean and austere; we seem to expect greater inspiration after the mighty texts of Christmas and today's lovely Hours. A hard shell, however, often contains a sweet kernel. The reason for the station church, St. Mary Major, is easily seen; John was entrusted as a son to the Mother of God. The *Introit* (see the Common of Doctors) here appears in its oldest setting. *In medio* . . . because of his writings John will remain for all times the great teacher in the Church. Recall how often he speaks to us in the

liturgy. See how dramatically the liturgy introduces him — John is the priest proceeding through the "midst of the church" to the altar!

The *Collect* prays for the Church: "Enlightened by the teaching of our saint, may she obtain everlasting gifts!" This is a genuinely liturgical prayer because it is oriented to the whole Mystical Body rather than to individuals. The *Epistle* deserves more than a hasty, superficial reading; the "honorable mother" (wisdom) is again the Church; now at Mass she meets her children, full of joy; she nourishes them with the bread of life (Eucharist) and the water of wisdom (God's word). The passage today, however, is applied to the apostle John.

For a *Gospel* we would perhaps have chosen some other episode from the apostle's life; the *Gradual* and the *Communion* point out why the liturgy deems it important by repeating Christ's statement: "I will have him remain thus till I come (*donec venio*)." These last words give the theme of the Mass. According to Christ's wish, John would not die a martyr. Yet, quite likely, the liturgy is referring to John's innocence. "*Sic* eum volo manere." For us "coming" means Christ's grace-laden coming at Christmas. In the person of John the virgin, holy Church goes to meet her King. In the *Offertory* our apostle stands before us like a palm or a cedar. In the *Secret* we offer God the sacrificial gifts in the hope of receiving pardon through the patronage of the beloved disciple. — After Mass today "St. John's Wine" is blessed in many places. Promoting sacramental blessings with their related customs is an important part of the liturgical apostolate.[1]

[1] An English translation of all the blessings in the Roman Ritual may be obtained from the Bruce Publishing Company, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Selections from the Ritual, in full or adapted form, may be otained from various sources, e.g., Pio Decimo Press, Box 53, Baden Station, St. Louis 15, Missori; Grailville School of Christian Living, Grailville, Loveland, Ohio; Conception Abbey Press, Conception, Missouri; National Catholic Rural Life Conference, 8301 Grand Ave., Des Moines, Iowa; The Liturgical Press, St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota. Catalogs available upon request.



December 28

HOLY INNOCENTS

Go to meet the King wearing the robe of innocence and holding the palm of martyrdom

Following the feast of a martyr and the feast of a virgin comes one that combines virginity and martyrdom. On weekdays it is celebrated in violet color, without Gloria or Alleluia. However, when December 28 falls on a Sunday, the Church uses red, the color of martyrdom, and includes the Gloria, Te Deum, and Alleluia.

Today's feast may be analyzed from two approaches. It is, first, the climax to the post-Christmas trilogy; the first day we went to meet the King as martyrs; the second, as virgins; the third, as virgin-matryrs. Secondly, the feast continues Christmas theology. Originally today's liturgy commemorated the flight into Egypt; it was not a feast honoring the murdered babes of Bethlehem.

1. The Feast. (a) *Holy Innocents and the post-Christmas trilogy.* If we weigh the liturgical texts, especially the antiphons in which the message of a feast is most clearly expressed, we find the incident of the massacre at Bethlehem strongly idealized. The Church does not stop with history, in the Holy Children she sees figures of those elect in whom her highest ideal is fully

realized, individuals who both preserved virginity and shed their blood for Christ. The many quotations from the Apocalypse (Epistle and chants) serve such purpose well. These slain infants typified the goal sought after in early Christianity; resplendent with the purple of martyrdom and the lily-white of virginity, they form the inner circle of the Lamb's honor-chorus. Thus the feast easily touches practical Christian morality and suggests the liturgical way of applying Christmas to life and conduct.

b) *Holy Innocents and Christmas theology.* Modern Christmas piety stands in awe before the sweet Child in the manger and dwells too little on the dogma of redemption. Crib and Cross stand on the same theological plane. The liturgy, therefore, does not exclude the Passion-theme on the happy Christmas feast — it enters quietly, softly at Matins (Ps. 2: "How the Gentiles rage . . .") and at the Mass ("the darkness did not grasp it" — *Gosp.*); it grows stronger on the following days, on the feast of St. Stephen, on Holy Innocents, and on the Sunday within the octave.

Just observe how these three feasts stress suffering and persecution. On Holy Innocents' death is already intended for the "newborn King of the Jews," but Bethlehem's infants ward off the stroke. On Sunday Simeon prophesies: "He is set for a sign that shall be contradicted." On the feast of the Circumcision the first blood flows in redemption. From then on the Passion theme will not be silenced till it is merged in the ocean of suffering on Good Friday. By it transition is made to the next festal cycle. Opposition to the Prince of Light will constantly become greater. Battle lines are forming. The Cross throws its shadow upon Chrismas. The Child of Bethlehem comes in order to ascend the Cross — and to impose the cross on us!

2. Divine Office. St. Augustine's homily in the second nocturn is touchingly beautiful:

"Today, dearest brethren, we celebrate the birthday of those children who were slaughtered, as the Gospel tells us, by that exceedingly cruel king, Herod. Let the earth, therefore, rejoice and the Church exult — she, the fruitful mother of so many

heavenly champions and of such glorious virtues. Never, in fact, would that impious tyrant have been able to benefit these children by the sweetest kindness as much as he has done by his hatred. For as today's feast reveals, in the measure with which malice in all its fury was poured out upon the holy children, did heaven's blessing stream down upon them.

"Blessed are you, Bethlehem in the land of Judah! You suffered the inhumanity of King Herod in the murder of your babes and thereby have become worthy to offer to the Lord a pure host of infants. In full right do we celebrate the heavenly birthday of these children whom the world caused to be born unto an eternally blessed life rather than that from their mothers' womb, for they attained the grace of everlasting life before the enjoyment of the present. The precious death of any martyr deserves high praise because of his heroic confession; the death of these children is precious in the sight of God because of the beatitude they gained so quickly. For already at the beginning of their lives they pass on. The end of the present life is for them the beginning of glory. These then, whom Herod's cruelty tore as sucklings from their mothers' bosom, are justly hailed as "infant martyr flowers"; they were the Church's first blossoms, matured by the frost of persecution during the cold winter of unbelief."

All hail! ye infant martyr flowers
Cut off in life's first dawning hours,
As rosebuds snapt in tempest strife
When Herod sought your Savior's life.
—*Matins hymn*

"Innocent infants have been slain for Christ's sake; at the breasts they were put to death by the wicked king; they are following Him, the Lamb, without stain and say forever: Glory be to You, O Lord!" (*Magn. Ant.*).

3. Holy Mass (Ex ore infantium). At the station church, St. Paul's, in a sarcophagus beneath the apse, five bodies of the Holy Innocents have been venerated from early times. Approach-

ing the altar we hear the little martyrs praising the Lamb in the words of Psalm 8; and we quickly add our voices to their song. The world and Israel refused to pay due honor to God and His Anointed, while these infants in the cradle offered choicest praise.

Study the *Collect;* its message is deepest liturgy: *non loquendo sed moriendo,* "not by talking, but by dying!" Liturgy is not primarily words, rather action; or better, words that turn into action. Liturgists will apply the principle to themselves. Sacrifice is paramount, not reading or liturgical dramatics.

The *Epistle* draws back the curtains of heaven to reveal the mystery of heavenly worship: the divine Lamb standing slain upon the altar, surrounded by the 144,000 pure souls, firstlings of God! How well the Apocalypse unveils the inner nature of every Mass! In the company of God's chosen multitude we celebrate the holy Eucharist. The *Gospel* introduces an austere note into the peace-melody of Christmas as it provides a speedy exemplification of what we heard in the third Mass on Christmas: "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." The Messiah must flee to Egypt; from Egypt He had once freed His people. The tragedy of Christ's rejection by the Chosen People has already taken place. In the remaining chants the Holy Innocents speak of heavenly things; they are rejoicing because, like trapped birds, they escaped Herod's snares and now enjoy eternal liberty. It is not exactly easy to explain why the *Communion* repeats Rachel's "weeping and mourning." There are tensely solemn moments in liturgical drama; this may be one of them.

4. **Violet.** What, it may be asked, induced the Church to use signs of penance during today's Mass? It may lead to the answer if we first point out that this day was once a day of penance and mourning in Rome. The faithful abstained from meat and from foods prepared with lard. And the reason? A ready answer is: the Church is mourning with the mothers who were robbed of their children. An answer, but hardly a plausible one. That sorrow has long ago given way to joy, since the children have received the palm of martyrdom. In the lesson (*see above*) St.

Augustine invites us to rejoice, for Herod could not have done the children a greater favor.

For a better answer to the question I suggest that we analyze the situation between Christ and Herod. In killing the children Herod wanted to kill our King. That makes the day like Good Friday anticipated. We mourn and fast because *in symbol* our Bridegroom is already taken from us; we grieve because Herod desired to kill the King of the Jews, the Savior. December 28 is a prelude to Friday in Holy Week.

SUNDAY WITHIN THE OCTAVE OF CHRISTMAS

The King sees His Cross

This liturgy is celebrated only when none of the three feasts following immediately upon Christmas occurs on Sunday; in cases of conflict, the Sunday Office is transferred to the first open weekday.

The Mass for the Sunday after Christmas is not without its contribution to the development of Christmas theology. Its message can be expressed briefly in the phrase: from the Crib to the Cross!

1. Divine Office. Today's Divine Office is almost identical with that of Christmas. Thus we are privileged to recite once more Christmas Matins. The lessons, however, are not the same. In the first nocturn they are taken from the Epistle to the Romans. Before Christmas the prophet Isaias foretold the glory of God's kingdom and the dignity of the Redeemer; now after the incarnation Paul portrays Christ and the Church as our permanent possession. The Epistle to the Romans is Paul's longest and most profound letter, a statement of his faith, his *Credo*. The second nocturn contains part of a Christmas sermon by Pope St. Leo.

2. Holy Mass (Dum medium). It helps in understanding the

Mass if we remember that it originally belonged on the Sunday after the Circumcision. Tension is high as it develops three motifs (a) that of Christmas; (b) that of the Passion; (c) that of Easter. The *Introit* takes us back to the Holy Night; we see the Child in the manger and at the same time the King descending from His heavenly throne. The resurrection psalm (92) occurs repeatedly (it is familiar to us from Lauds). It tells us who this Child of Bethlehem is and where His crib is set: He is the King of the universe, clothed with creation as a sash; He rises triumphant over primeval chaos and hell, our Redeemer. Do not miss the symbolism; the priest entering the sanctuary in rich vestments represents the King coming down upon earth!

The practical man will love the *Collect* with its stress on good works. The *Epistle* relates Christmas to Easter, thereby indicating the deepest meaning of the Mass action: "God sent His Son, born of woman . . . that He might redeem us . . . that we might receive the adoption of sons." We are God's freed children; Easter's great blessings are ready; in the Newborn we are made children of God and heirs of heaven. The *Gradual* and *Alleluia* chants present both aspects of the Christmas mystery, viz., the lovely Infant and the triumphant King.

The *Gospel* surprises us. All of a sudden it is forty days after the nativity and we are in the temple, witnesses to a memorable scene. For the Child and His Mother the aged Simeon prophesies the Cross and sorrow: "This One is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many, and for a sign which shall be contradicted . . . Thy own soul a sword shall pierce. . . ." A shrill oracle amid the calm peace of the season! Our lovely Infant will soon be the Man of Sorrows; the serene Virgin Mother, hardly more than a child herself, will become *Mater dolorosa.* The divine Hero will indeed vanquish the flood, but like a second Samson will first be buried under it.

At the *Offertory* we take our gifts to the altar, Christ's crib and throne; during the Sacrifice proper we expect the divine Child and crucified King to appear there. The *Secret* presents to God our sacrificial gifts and begs in return the grace of submis-

sion here on earth and eternal blessedness hereafter. The *Communion* (with its indication that the Mass belongs to the Sunday after Circumcision) gives the final incident in Christ's childhood. For us it is a cry out of exile to our heavenly homeland. To sum up: history and mystery are brought together today in three words: Crib, Cross, Altar.

2. The Introit.

> While all things were in quiet silence,
> and the night was in the midst of her course,
> Your almighty Word leapt down from heaven,
> from Your royal throne, O Lord.

A splendid text inviting us to pause a moment in holy contemplation at the crib!

A genuine Introit antiphon gives the spirit of the day. Like a dewdrop it should glisten on one's mind upon awakening; its words should be the first to pass our lips in the morning and echo again with each hour-chime throughout the day. Today's Introit has such possibilities.

We are standing before the crib in the Holy Night. The noise of the world has ceased; it seems as if mankind were holding their breath. Presently we see the Son of God come down upon the earth. However, it is not the Child, but God's "almighty Word" that descends from the royal heights of heaven, exchanging a throne for a crib.

"*While all things were in quiet silence. . . .*" To the invitation of solemn silence God responds with His coming. In bustling Jerusalem, in Herod's noisy palace there was no room for divinity. But in the silence of peaceful Bethlehem, in the company of the holy couple, there God appeared. Silence is the soul's *clausura*. Before God can come into any heart, deep silence must envelop all my wayward intellect, my rebellious will, my unruly passions.

"*And the night was in the midst of her course.*" It was midnight when the Son of God descended upon the earth. God does nothing by chance; He chose to come at night. The chief events

of salvation happened in darkness. At the dawn of sacred history the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage, prefiguring our redemption by Christ, occurred at night; the institution of the holy Eucharist took place after sundown; true, Christ died in daytime, but only after the sun turned black. The early Christians preferred the night for their prayers and for the celebration of the sacred mysteries. Silence and night, therefore, are the cloak in which God wraps Himself when He comes to us with His grace. In the dark silence of a winter night the "Word" of the Father, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, came to earth from His starry throne.

Have you ever given thought to the other thrones which Christ wishes to ascend? I have counted six. Of the first, the Introit tells; upon that throne the Second Divine Person sat from eternity; from there He took part in governing the world and creation; there, too, the work of redemption was determined. The second throne was the stable's mean crib. The hard straw, the poor swaddling clothes, the raw wind were mankind's reception committee. But Jesus wanted to exchange this throne for one still harder, the Cross. To it the aged Simeon clearly alludes when he says in the Gospel: "This Child is set for a sign that shall be contradicted."

All life long Jesus looked steadfastly toward this throne, because from it He desired to draw all things to Himself. Upon the fourth throne He sits in His glorified humanity, His reward in heaven for the hard work of redemption. On earth He retains a very precious throne, the altar; to it He descends at every Mass for it is His delight to dwell among the children of men. This throne looms large at the Offertory of today's Mass; from here Christ distributes His graces. The sixth throne is our human heart. What good would be the thrones of crib or Cross if He were not permitted to reign in our hearts? To enter the throne of your heart He conceals Himself in the mystery of the Eucharist. Keep that throne always in readiness for His coming. Remember the words of the Offertory: "Thy throne, O Lord, is prepared."

December 29

ST. THOMAS OF CANTERBURY, Bishop and Martyr

The Good Shepherd invites pastors to the crib

If you wish to relate Christmas to today's feast, I should think this statement would be helpful. Actually the feast of St. Thomas has no inherent connection with Christmas, as do the feasts from December 26 to 28; it is celebrated because the octave permits feasts of lower rank. Thomas does not belong to the retinue following the newborn King. We may as well admit that we find this feast somewhat disturbing during the octave of Christmas.

1. St. Thomas of Canterbury. Thomas Becket was born in 1118 of a merchant family. He studied in London and Paris, entered the service of Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury, became lord chancellor under King Henry II in 1155, and in 1162 archbishop of Canterbury. Till then a submissive courtier, he now initiated a fearless struggle against the king for the freedom of the Church and the inviolability of ecclesiastical property, occasioning his imprisonment, exile, and finally martyrdom (December 29, 1170). Canonization came quickly (1173); in 1539 King Henry VIII ordered his remains burned.

The Breviary gives this summary of the saint's last days: "Calumniators informed the king that the bishop was agitating against him and the peace of the realm; and the king retorted that with one such priest he could not live in peace. Hearing the royal displeasure, several godless courtiers agreed to do their sovereign a favor by assassinating Thomas. Secretly they travelled to Canterbury and fell upon the bishop while he was attending Vespers. His priests rushed to his aid and tried to bar the church door; Thomas opened it himself with these words: The house of God may not be defended like a fortress. I gladly face death for the Church of God. Then to the soldiers: I command it in the Name of God: No harm may be done to any of mine. Thereupon he cast himself on his knees, commended his flock and himself to God, to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to St. Denis and

other holy patrons of his church, and with the same heroic courage with which he had withstood the king's laws, he bowed his holy head to the sacrilegious sword on December 29, 1170."

2. Divine Office. The psalms for all the Hours, except Vespers, are taken from the weekday psalter. (a) Scripture Reading. With this feast the regular Scripture reading is resumed. St. Paul's epistles are in season and will be read in sequence till Saturday before Septuagesima. There is good reason for the Church's selection of the Pauline epistles at this time; for when the great feast of the Gentile Church (Epiphany) occurs, it is appropriate to listen to the apostle of the Gentiles. In Advent Isaias heralded the kingdom of God, now Paul shows its glorious consummation. It would be difficult to find another book that portrays the excellence of Christ's kingdom better than the Epistle to the Romans.

The current series begins with St. Paul's most important letter, that to the Romans. In it the apostle explains Christ's work of redemption in all its depth and breadth. The Letter is addressed to the Church of Rome, a community consisting partly of pagan and partly of Jewish converts whom Paul had never met. Since Judaism saw in Paul a bitter enemy, he repeatedly was obliged to make clear his position on the Mosaic Law. He wrote the Epistle at Corinth (58 A.D.) in the midst of his missionary activity in the East; already his heart was longing for Rome. Our Epistle is a memorial of that ardent longing.

Today we read the opening chapter; it is introductory and states the theme of the Epistle. The initial verses, familiar to us from the Mass of the Vigil of Christmas, depict Christ in precise, clear words as God and Man. The subject matter of the Epistle follows. Salvation for all mankind, Jew and Gentile, rests on faith in the gospel: "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jews first and then to the Gentiles."

Before the gospel was preached, all mankind was by its own guilt subject to divine judgment. The point is developed with reference to the Gentiles in verses 18–32. In spite of the natural

knowledge of God — for the Creator speaks to everyone through His creatures — the Gentile world strayed from the true God and gave itself over to the worship of base idols. The consequence was abyssmal moral corruption. "What is invisible about God (e.g.,), His eternal power and divinity, is evident from His works ever since the creation of the world; therefore they have no excuse. And though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God but became intellectually vain. And their foolish minds were darkened . . . They exchanged the glory of God immutable for images of mortal men, of birds, four-footed animals and serpents. Therefore God abandoned them to their lust after uncleanness." The Epistle continues with a vivid description of the moral corruption in paganism.

b) St. John Chrysostom, himself a model pastor, speaks today in the Divine Office on the meaning of the priesthood:

"Grand indeed is the work of the priesthood; tremendously grand, if I may repeat. Great wisdom and courage are required; for, as the Lord enjoins: we must sacrifice our lives for the sheep, we must never forsake them, we must bravely resist the wolf. Here we have the difference between the shepherd and the hireling; the one, concerned primarily over his own safety, neglects the sheep; the other, sacrificing himself, is concerned chiefly over the safety of the flock. Long ago Ezechiel had this to say: Woe to Israel's shepherds! For they are simply pasturing themselves. It is the flock that must be fed by the shepherds, isn't it? Yet they do the very opposite, exemplifying exquisite malice and causing many evils. Further, the prophet says: What was scattered, they did not lead back; what was lost, they did not seek; what was broken, they did not mend, nor did they carefully attend the weak. Only themselves, not the flocks, have they cared for.

"The same indictment Paul puts in other words: Every one pursues his own interests, not the things of Christ. Now Christ shows us how He differs from those who mean to bring destruction by His statement: I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance. And secondly, He shows us how

He differs from those who unconcernedly allow the wolves to rob the sheep by His words: I lay down My life for My sheep. Accordingly He would not stop announcing the glad tidings, He would not leave the believers to their fate when the Jews sought to kill Him; He persevered steadfast, and even suffered death. Therefore He could well repeat: I am the Good Shepherd. At the moment His words were not confirmed by evidence; only later did He offer proof by laying down his life; while only in the future world will it be fully realized how through Him men may have life in abundance. Thus His one statement is verified through the other."

3. Holy Mass (Gaudeamus omnes). That an air of solemnity characterizes the Mass is already evident in the *Introit* (of Greek origin and first used on the feast of St. Agatha): "Let us rejoice in the Lord as we celebrate this feast in honor of the holy martyr Thomas. . . ." Thematic is the text: "I am the Good Shepherd. I know Mine . . ."; it occurs three times, as *Alleluia* chant, *Gospel,* and *Communion.* The parable of the Good Shepherd is doubly applicable today, to Christ and to Thomas. In each Mass Christ manifests pastoral care for His sheep; today Thomas is His image and representative (*Off.*). As we become mystically united with Christ and with Thomas, we also want to become sharers in their pastoral love, fidelity, and care. Liturgists will have special appreciation for the *Epistle,* taken from the Letter to the Hebrews. Christ's priesthood is the topic. As eternal High Priest, He offers a bloody Sacrifice; this oblation is continued in the Mass performed by the ordained priests of the Church in union with the common priesthood of the faithful. A final remark. The Lessons are taken from the Greek Common of Martyr Bishops (see the feast of St. Josaphat, November 14).

December 30

WITHIN THE CHRISTMAS OCTAVE

A grand mystery! A wondrous sacrament!
Animals look at the newborn Lord lying in the crib.
Blessed are you, O Virgin, for your womb was privileged
to bear Christ the Lord!
Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee!

It would be ideal if we could devote several days of the Christmas octave to quiet contemplation, entering ever more deeply into the sweet and profound mystery of the incarnation; yet most of the time is devoted to the saints. All the more precious, therefore, is this day, an unencumbered Christmas-day. Apart from the Epistle and Gospel, the formulary is identical with that of the third Mass on Christmas. Let us give it full consideration.

1. **Divine Office.** Most of the Office is the same as on Christmas. How wonderful to pray the psalms and the beautiful responsories of Christmas Matins at one's leisure. Very likely you will discover many a nugget that escaped your attention in the tension of Christmas eve. Our thoughts center upon the newborn King:

O King of heaven, whom all things serve!
He who encompasses the world lies in a stable.
He is put into a manger, He who reigns in heaven!
This day is born to us the Savior,
who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David.

Let heaven rejoice, let the earth be glad;
let the ocean roar and all it fills.
Let the fields exult and whatever they bear,
let the trees of the woods rustle before the face of
the Lord,
for He is come.

(Ps. 95, at Matins and at Mass)

CHRIST IS BORN TO US!

COME, LET US ADORE ✚

Inanimate creation greets the Redeemer, for it too longs to be freed from the curse that struck it because of man's sin (Rom. 8:22). Nature's homage to the newborn Son of God is beautifully expressed in Psalm 95; heaven, earth, sea, fields, all pay homage to their Lord. It is the Holy Night, and a rustling fills the trees about Bethlehem; it widens out to all the forests in the world: "He is come!" And the tree which thirty-three years later provides the Cross trembles at the message.

St. Ambrose's brief homily on the Gospel of the adoration by the shepherds occasions some unusual reflections:

"You see the shepherds hastening to Bethlehem, for no one who really seeks Christ seeks Him lackadaisically. Note how they believed the angel; and you do not want to believe the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the angels, the prophets, and the apostles? Look closely, and see how carefully Sacred Scripture weighs the meaning of the various words. They hasten, it says, to see the Word. For if you see the body of the Lord, you also see the Word, God's Son. Do not despise the example given by the shepherds, regarding them as rude and simple. For this is certain: the simpler they were in human wisdom, the nobler is their faith.

"The Lord does not summon intellectuals from schools of advanced learning, but common people who do not know how to turn and twist what they hear. Simplicity is sought for, not ostentation. Nor should you despise the words of the shepherds as of little account. For even Mary was strengthened in faith by the shepherds; and because of them people at large came to worship God. All who heard were astounded at what the shepherds told them. But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart. Observe how perfectly chaste Mary was, as reserved with her tongue as with her whole being. For she conceals the mysteries of faith deep in her heart."

2. Scripture Reading (Rom. ch. 2). In chapter one Paul presented a vivid picture of the moral bankruptcy of paganism; now he shows why the Jews have no reason to exalt themselves over the Gentiles. They too merited God's wrath because they

did not obey the Law of Moses. "Therefore you are guilty, O man (Jew), when you condemn another. For when you judge another, you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, do the same things. . . . Do you really believe, O man, as you sit in judgment over sinners while committing the same sins yourself, that you will escape the judgment of God? . . . Tribulation and anguish will come upon every human being who does evil, upon the Jews first, then also upon the Gentiles. On the other hand glory, honor, and peace for everyone who does good, for the Jews first but also for the Gentiles. For with God there is no respect of persons. Now if one not bound by the Law sins, he will perish apart from the Law; and if one bound by the Law sins, he will be condemned by the Law. For the hearers of the Law are not thereby justified in God's sight, but those who obey the Law will be justified. For when Gentiles who do not have Law fulfill through reason the requirements of the Law, then these with no Law are their own law. They show that what the Law demands is written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness. . . ." What Paul says can serve as a principle in our appraisal of modern-day pagans, unbelievers and atheists.

And we must pass judgment on ourselves with the same rigor with which Paul condemned the Jew who knew the Law. "He is not a true Jew who is one outwardly; nor is that true circumcision which is performed externally on the flesh; but he is a Jew who is so inwardly, and true circumcision is that of the heart, according to the spirit and not the letter. . . ." For the words *Jew* and *circumcision* substitute *Christian* and *baptism*; then the text will apply.

3. A Christmas Meditation. "God became Man that man might become God!" This truth, cast in parallel phrases, summarized the Christmas mystery to the Christians of old. It impinged itself deeply in their spirituality; in almost identical words the truth occurs frequently in the Fathers and in ancient liturgical texts. God assumed a human nature to effect man's participation in the divine nature; God became a Child that we might become children of God. The birthday of Christ inaugu-

rates our divine birth. With Christ we were born God's children.

God became Man. Utterly incomprehensible is this truth to our puny human minds! That the eternal God whom heaven and earth cannot contain, who bears the world in His hand as a nutshell, before whom a thousand years are as one day — that this eternal, omnipotent God should become Man! Would it not have been a tremendous condescension if for the redemption of mankind He had simply sent an angel? Would it not have proven His loving mercy had He appeared for a mere moment in the splendor of His majesty, amid thunder and lightning, as once on Sinai? No, such would have shown far too little of His love and kindness. He wanted to be like us, to become a child of man, a poor child of poorest people; He wished to be born, in a cave, in a strange land, in hostile surroundings. Cold wind, hard straw, dumb animals — these were there to greet Him. The scene fills us with amazement; what other can we do than fall down in silence and adore!

In heaven only will we comprehend the profound implications of Christ's redemptive acts, surely one of the exquisite joys of celestial blessedness. But some points Mother Church allows us to anticipate here below. She, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, is ever the recollected woman "who meditates on all the words of God and keeps them in her heart." She tells us: God became Man that we might share His divine nature. Isn't that mankind's long-cherished dream? "You shall be as God, knowing good and evil," Satan whispered into man's ear in paradise; and his whisper was believed. What a miserable betrayal! Indeed, man experienced good and evil, but he had not turned divine. Thousands upon thousands of years of dreadful distance from divinity, with nought but failure in scanning the skies! Not by pride can man become God, but by submission, humility.

Bethlehem gave the great revelation. God put on the beggar's garb, became a tiny, crying Babe in order to show man how to become divine. In paradise a fallen angel had promised: Eat of this fruit and you will be like God. He ate and became a prisoner of hell. On Christmas night another angel (the Church) stands

before man, offers him a Food and says: Eat of this and you will be like God. For the divine Food, the Flesh of the incarnate Son of God, makes us "partakers of the divine nature."

December 31

ST. SYLVESTER, Pope

How a confessor receives the King

God's children still live on earth, computing their time in terms of days, weeks, and years. Each unit makes an impression, particularly the great cycle beginning the civil year; and the transition is marked with celebration. In her liturgy the Church does not celebrate this transition from the old year to the new. The devotions held in certain churches are the expression of popular piety. The Church in her mysteries already lives on the timeless level of eternity. Nor has the feast of St. Sylvester a relation to the Christmas mystery; it belongs to the most ancient feasts of the Church and Christian tradition has assigned it a fixed place on the last day of December.

1. St. Sylvester I. *Day of death*: December 31, 335. *Grave*: first in the Catacomb of St. Priscilla, above which a basilica was dedicated to him; here Pope St. Gregory the Great gave his celebrated homily in honor of his sainted predecessor. St. Sylvester now lies buried in the Church of St. Symmachus. His feast is numbered among the oldest of the Roman Church. He is one of the first saints to receive public veneration without actually having died as a martyr. *Life*. Sylvester I reigned as Pope from 314 to 335, succeeding Pope Melchiades. Because of his banishment to Mount Soracte, he was considered a "confessor" and counted among the martyrs. During his pontificate the Church began to come out of the darkness of the catacombs. He was a friend of Emperor Constantine, confirmed the first General Council of Nice (325), gave the Church a new discipline for the new era

of peace. He might be called the first "peace Pope" after centuries of bloody persecution. A series of illustrious basilicas were erected during his reign (Lateran, St. Peter's, St. Paul's).

Numerous legends dramatize his life and work, e.g., how he freed Constantine from leprosy by baptism; how he killed a ferocious dragon that was contaminating the air with his poisonous breath. Such legends were meant to portray the effects of baptism and Christianity's triumph over idolatry. For a long time the feast of St. Sylvester was a holyday of obligation. The Divine Office notes: He called the weekdays *feria,* because for the Christian every day is a "free day" (the term is still in use; thus Monday is *feria secunda.*).

2. Scripture Reading. We continue our reading of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans (3:19–31). The sequence of the argument is important. So far the apostle has established that both Gentiles and Jews are sinners; all men, therefore, stand in need of redemption (3:1–20). With this settled, he can state his main thesis: the way to salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ. But before Paul develops his proposition, he puts the question: Has Israel no priority over the Gentiles? "What advantage then has the Jew, or what good is circumcision? Much, from many respects. In the first place, God's promises were entrusted to them. Even if some became unfaithful, will their unbelief make God's fidelity void? Never! God remains true. . . ."

Now the way is clear for the principal thesis. The Redeemer's sacrificial death effected justification objectively, a justification that is personally attainable only through faith in Jesus Christ. Faith is the foundation of justification, not the injunctions of Mosaic Law, of which the Jews were so proud. It is a pure gift.

"But now God's justice has been made manifest apart from the Law, attested indeed by the Law and the prophets. It is the justice of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all and upon all who believe. There is no distinction; all have sinned and are without the glory of God. But they will be justified gratis through His grace, in virtue of the redemption through Christ Jesus. God set Him up as a bloody expiation sacrifice applicable (to us)

through faith. This was to prove His justice. For in His patience God overlooked the sins of former times, that at the present time He might manifest His justice; therefore He is just and justifies him who believes in Jesus. What, then, happens to our boasting? It is eliminated. By what kind of law? That of works? No; by the law of faith. For we maintain that man is justified by faith apart from the Law. Should God be God only of the Jews and not of the Gentiles too? Certainly of the Gentiles too."

3. **Holy Mass (Si diligis me).** For comment on this Mass from the Common of Sovereign Pontiffs, see p. 170, (December 11, Pope St. Damasus).

4. **Reflections at the Close of the Year.** We Christians belong to time *and* to eternity; we live in time and rise above it. Because Christ gave us the eternal life of God's children in baptism, we have definite assurance of never really tasting death. Therefore as Christians we do not cling to time; for us it is only a way to the goal, a means for reaching eternity. Our best teacher of liturgical piety, St. Paul, says so beautifully: "Life for me is Christ, and death a gain." He wants to say: The essence of my life on earth is Christ; death, therefore, is not a loss but a great gain, because it unites me most perfectly with Jesus.

Hasn't the Church been trying very hard during these last weeks (the Church's harvest time) to arouse in our hearts ardent desire for the coming Lord? Let her efforts bear fruit. The Christian whose heart beats with the Church goes through life with a homesickness for Christ; he does not become absorbed by the superficiality of earth. His home is the heavenly Jerusalem. The Jerusalem on earth, holy Church, is merely a colony; as a colonist he has the right of celestial citizenship. He is an alien to earth, yes, a troublesome stranger in this world.

Because the Church is a colony of heaven, there is an air of eternity about her; her feasts and celebrations image the eternal feast in heaven where the blessed observe a perennial Sunday. The liturgy with its even tenor, its uninterrupted praise of God, mirrors eternity. We read above how St. Sylvester called the weekdays *feria* because every day for the Christian is a "free

day," i.e., a holiday for God. O my brothers and sisters, if you desire to live and think with the Church, immerse yourselves in the liturgy. Stand consciously opposed to the world, because the world of today advocates so clearly a living just for the moment. Such living is altogether too individualistic, too selfish, too much a petty clinging to bubbles, too hectic a higgling and haggling for money and praise — things that are of time and pass away. Let time march on as you lose yourself in the timelessness of the Church, as you clothe yourself with ageless liturgy.

On New Year's Day the Breviary gives this brief but significant message: "All things earthly pass away, but You remain the same; everything grows old like clothing, and as old clothing you put it away; but You, Yourself, O God, are always the same and Your years never multiply." Let us, therefore, live on earth a life of eternity! Nevertheless, we must not look upon time disdainfully. It is a means unto eternity and we have to use it well, "The night comes when no man can work." It is a way to the goal, and so must be exploited. Therefore, use your time well; or as St. Paul says: "Redeem the time!" How? Fulfill your God-appointed duties. Dream less of the past and future and concentrate on present spiritual progress. Christ said: "Every day has its sorrow; solicitous for itself will be the morrow" (*see* Mt. 6:34). Do not worry over yesterday or tomorrow, work for God. Yesterday is past, tomorrow is uncertain; but today, the present moment, is entirely in your hands. Exploit it!

Or approach the problem in this manner. Sanctify time by immersing it in the Church's year of grace. A program has already been worked out for the day, the week, the year, and life. Daily in the holy Sacrifice a divine Sun rises over our day; and its hours are hallowed by the light of the Divine Office. Upon the week Sunday sets its seal. Esteem it highly! The Church year sanctifies the months as they pass; these are God's seasons and give the soul life, fertility, and growth. And around your whole earthly life the Church braids the wreath of sacramental consecration, from baptism to holy anointing. How easy it is to make time eternal.

January 1

CIRCUMCISION OF OUR LORD

The first sacrifice of blood flows in redemption

Today's liturgy commemorates the circumcision of Jesus. "And when the eight days were completed for His circumcision, His Name was called Jesus, the Name given Him by the angel before He was conceived in the womb" (*Gospel*).

1. The feast's liturgy touches four subjects: (a) the New Year; (b) the octave of Christmas; (c) the circumcision of Jesus; (d) Mary, God's Mother.

a) On the civil calendar it is New Year's Day. The Church takes some cognizance of it, or it would hardly be a holyday of obligation. At the threshold of the civil year we ought to pay God the homage of willing allegiance. He is the Lord of time. May we use the precious days of the new year entirely in accordance with the purposes of divine Providence, employing them as stepping-stones to eternity.

b) Today is the octave or the eighth day after the feast of Christmas. In the spirit of the Church the great feasts of redemption should not be restricted to a single celebration but should continue on through a full week. Mother Church is a good psychologist; she understands human nature perfectly.

When a feast comes, the soul is amazed and not quite prepared to think profoundly upon its mystery; but on the following days the mind finds it easy to consider the mystery from all sides, sympathetically and deeply; and an eighth day affords a wonderful opportunity to make a synthesis of all points covered. The octave of Christmas is not the best example because other feasts distract one from the Christmas theme; this octave day, therefore, takes on greater importance. Today for the last time the Church leads us to the crib at Bethlehem.

c) In addition to this general Christmas approach, specific emphasis is placed upon the circumcision of Jesus. It is the mystery proper to the day. Eight days after His birth, the Child was circumcized according to the Mosaic Law, and was given the Name assigned to Him by an angel before He was conceived, Jesus. This mystery of the feast can be viewed from two viewpoints, with reference to our Savior, and with reference to us. Both viewpoints have good foundation in the liturgical texts.

Christ came upon earth to redeem mankind. He could have accomplished our redemption by a single word or act. But He desired to carry out His saving mission through a series of actions and to crown it finally with the supreme work, His death and resurrection. All the various acts and actions were performed for our sake to help us understand the nature and the implications of redemption. To the earliest phase of the redemptive work belongs the circumcision. Today flows the first drop of the Redeemer's blood; it is the *sacrificium matutinum,* the morning offering; the evening sacrifice, *sacrificium vespertinum*, will follow on the Cross. Today a drop, after thirty-three years the full measure of His blood will flow. Today's feast, therefore, comes between Christmas and Easter, between the crib and the Cross; the Child is still in swaddling clothes and already Its blood is shed for mankind.

The circumcision has implications also for us. As we could say at Christmas: Christ is born, we are born with Him (we prayed in the *Postcommunion*: He is the Author of our divine birth), so we can say today: Christ was circumcized, we share His cir-

cumcision. For the purpose of the redemption is to cut off the old man with his sinful impulses. Although we have been sanctified radically in baptism, a sin-slanted nature remains within us. Consequently, there is a constant need for circumcision. Cutting off the old man and putting on Christ is effected through participation in the holy mysteries and by our persevering growth in virtue.

d) Today is also a Marian feast, perhaps the oldest. The Church is grateful to Mary for her part in the incarnation. How does the Church praise her today? As Mother of God and as Virgin. Note first of all the antiphons of Vespers. They have an Eastern tone, are profound and rich in content, and cover the whole Old Testament with its prophecies, e.g., Gedeon and the fleece, the burning bush, the root of Jesse, the star of Jacob. The liturgy does not fall for sentimentalism, as if Mary had suffered or shed tears at the circumcision. No, she is the priestess who joyfully and solemnly offers on high the Lord's firstfruits of sacrifice in redemption.

Mary also stands for the Church, and shows us her part and our part in the work of redemption. This morning, every morning, our virgin-mother, the Church, stands ready to let the blood of the Redeemer flow through her priestly hands into the hearts of her children. Your soul, too, may and should take Mary's place this day; in the Mass let the blood of the Savior flow for your benefit and for the good of your brothers and sisters.

2. **Divine Office.** It is essentially the Office of Christmas, but it also exhibits a series of proper texts with goodly messages. There is a certain lack of unity in the Office taken as a whole because the feast was subjected to a variety of changes under heterogeneous influences. First it was the octave of Christmas, then the feast of circumcision, then a Marian feast. The antiphons of Vespers and Lauds, derived from the Greek liturgy, differ from Roman models by employing a wealth of Old Testament types. "O wondrous exchange (*commercium* — a business deal)! The Creator of man, having assumed a living body, deigned to be born of a Virgin, and having become Man without man's

aid, enriched us with His divinity." The "business exchange" was this: God became Man that man might become God!

In the following antiphons Mary's virginity and motherhood are depicted in prophetic figures, viz., Gedeon's fleece, the burning bush, the star of Jacob. God's love is uppermost at sundown: "By reason of His very great love wherewith He loved us, God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, alleluia." The concluding Collect, like many other parts of the Office, centers entirely on Mary. Matins are inspiringly beautiful, the psalms flow smoothly. In the second nocturn we read a Christmas sermon of the great Pope St. Leo I; it shows dogmatic precision and reflects the religious struggle of the time.

"Beloved! Only he celebrates today's feast piously and truly who holds no false doctrine concerning the incarnation of the Lord or any unbecoming notions about His divinity. For it is equally dangerous to deny Him the reality of a human nature or equality in glory with the Father. As we now proceed to consider the mystery of Christ's nativity, how He was born of a Virgin Mother, we must wholeheartedly abandon the darkness of earthly speculation and let the night of worldly wisdom vanish from our eyes illumined by faith. For the authority to which we give credence is divine; and the truths we accept are divine.

"Now whether we lend our spiritual ear to the testimony of the Law, to the oracles of the prophets, or to the Gospel's bugle call, there is nothing but truth in those statements with which John, full of the Holy Spirit, begins his work: In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him, and without Him was made nothing. Equally true is what the same preacher adds later: The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us; and we saw His glory, glory as of the only-begotten of the Father.

"In both natures, therefore, there appears the same Son of God who assumes our nature without losing His own; who as Man renews men, Himself remaining immutable. For the divinity which He shares with the Father suffered no detriment to its

omnipotence, nor did the form of a servant desecrate the divine nature. The supreme and eternal Wisdom that stooped for the redemption of mankind has elevated us to Its glory without ceasing to be what It had been. When, then, the only-begotten Son of God says of Himself that He is less than the Father and that He is equal to the Father, He is simply revealing the reality of both natures in Himself. The inequality attests His human nature, the equality manifests Him as divine."

3. Scripture Reading (Rom. ch. 4). Today it happens that the topic of the current Scripture reading coincides with the mystery of the feast; both are concerned with circumcision. Paul has shown that justification is achieved only by faith in Christ. Now he must answer a Jewish objection. If he is right, then the Law and circumcision have no value. He replies: Not exactly. The Law was the pedagogue and the way to Christ, it pointed to Christ. "Do we therefore destroy the Law by faith? No; we fulfill the Law." For his answer Paul offers a twofold proof: first, from the history of Abraham (4:1–12), secondly, from God's promises to Abraham (4:13–25).

The apostle begins by showing how Abraham's faith was rewarded even before he was circumcized. He is, therefore, ancestor of all, of the circumcized Jews and of the uncircumcized Gentiles. "If Abraham was justified by works, he had reason to boast, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say: Abraham believed in God and it was credited to him unto justice . . . When was it credited to him? When he was already circumcized or when still uncircumcized? Not as circumcized, but as uncircumcized. He received the seal of circumcision as a sign of the justice derived from faith; it was bestowed on the uncircumcized so that he might be the father of all uncircumcized believers, (so that to them also faith might be credited unto justice) and father of the circumcized — of those, namely, who were not only circumcized (physically) but also followed our father Abraham in the faith which he had when he was still uncircumcized."

In ch. 4:13–25 Paul proves the faith of Abraham from God's

promise that He would make him the father of many nations. The patriarch's faith was most remarkable because the promise was made long before the birth of Isaac: "It is written: I have appointed him the father of many nations because he believed in God who raises the dead to life and calls what does not exist into being. Against all hope he, full of hope, believed that he would become the father of many nations according to the word: So shall your offspring be."

4. Holy Mass (Puer natus est). For the most part the formulary is taken from the Masses of Christmas, the chants from the third, the Epistle from the first. A special emphasis rests on the sentence, "He gave Himself for us that He might redeem us." The *Orations* refer to Mary, indicating her prominent position in the day's liturgy. Only the *Gospel* is proper, the shortest of the year. The stational church is the Marian church beyond the Tiber (S. Maria in Trastevere), but in ancient times it was the venerable S. Maria ad Martyres, the ancient Pantheon. Note the significant allusion: The Lord's first shedding of blood points to the last on the Cross; on both occasions Mary "stood" near. The sacred Blood which today sparkles in the chalice on the altar is the Blood Jesus shed, is Blood from the Virgin Mary.

> Blessed and worthy of all veneration are you,
> O Virgin Mary!
> With your virginity intact,
> you have become the Mother of the Redeemer
> who lay in the manger and shone in heaven.
> Lord, I heard Your voice,
> and I became afraid;
> I saw Your works and trembled:
> for between two beasts He lay in the manger
> who shone in heaven.
> (*Sixth Responsory at Matins.*)

5. The Names of the Lord. Our Savior has various names. How do they differ? The prophet Isaias called him *Emmanuel;* but, properly speaking, this is not a name for the Savior and it is

never so used of Him. The prophet merely wished to say that the Messiah's presence would mean God in our midst. In addition to the name *Jesus* given Him at His circumcision, our Savior bears the name *Christ*. Christ means the Anointed One, the Messiah. Originally, therefore, it was not a name, but indicated a title or mission. Therefore in St. Paul the word *Christ* often comes first: Christ Jesus, i.e., the Messiah (who is) Jesus. Therefore, you may also say "the Christ," like "the emperor" or "the bishop." Gradually, however, it became a second name for our Lord, with present usage combining both, as Jesus Christ.

But we also use the two names separately; there is a fine distinction between them, to which greater attention might be given. Jesus is the Savior's personal name, the name used in private, subjective piety. Thus when we hold intimate converse with our Lord before the tabernacle, the name Jesus comes naturally to our lips. The last three centuries have been a time of subjective piety and therefore the name Jesus is used very familiarly. Our feast bears witness to this. But "Christ" designates our Savior in His messianic work, it is the name proper to liturgical, impersonal piety. Hence the official liturgical texts use the name Christ much more frequently than the name Jesus, e.g., in the Canon of the Mass we find five prayers concluding with "Through Christ our Lord." In the liturgy the name Jesus rarely stands alone, it usually is followed by Christ.

Now to summarize our findings. When we say "Christ" we see before us the divine High Priest who re-enacts His Sacrifice on the altar, or the divine King who sits on the heavenly throne and who will come on the Last Day; in short, the incarnate God. And when we say "Jesus" we see the Man of Nazareth as He passed up and down in the land of Israel; we see Him with His kindly heart, His meekness and love, in His passion; His whole personality appears before us, the God-Man Jesus. Our use of the two names will reflect the area in which we are thinking.

Sunday between January 2 and 5 or January 2

FEAST OF THE HOLY NAME OF JESUS

At the Name of Jesus let every knee bend, of those in heaven, on earth, and under the earth; and let every tongue confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is in the glory of God the Father (Introit). *There is no other Name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved* (Epistle).

1. Introduction. This feast marks no progress in the development of the Church year. It merely embellishes the feast of Circumcision, the occasion on which the Child received the Name Jesus, as had been foretold by the angel. The feast is meant to impress on us Christians the dignity of the Holy Name. It is a relatively new feast, stemming out of devotional piety. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to find in it some liturgical or ancient Christian dogma. What did a name signify originally? The name should express the nature of a thing. Thus Adam in paradise gave the animals names in accordance with their being. Among the Jews God's name expressed His essence, Yahweh, i.e., I (alone) am who am (and cause all else to be). The Jews had the highest respect for the name of God, a reverence that finds continuation in the Our Father: "Hallowed be Thy Name."

Persons who played prominent roles in the history of salvation often received their names from God Himself. Adam — man of the earth; Eve — mother of all the living; Abraham — father of many nations; Peter — the rock. The Savior's precursor was given the name God assigned him. According to divine precedent, then, the name of the Redeemer should not be accidental, of human choosing, but given by God Himself. For His name should express His mission. We read in Sacred Scripture how the angel Gabriel revealed that name to Mary: "You shall call His name Jesus." And to St. Joseph the angel not merely revealed the name but explained its meaning: "You shall call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins." The Messiah should not only *be* the savior, but should be *called*

Savior. With Jesus, therefore, the name actually tells the purpose of His existence. This is why we must esteem His name as sacred. Whenever we pronounce it, we ought bow our heads; for the very name reminds us of the greatest favor we have ever received, salvation.

2. Divine Office. The composition of the Hours suffers from those weaknesses sometimes found in newer feasts; the construction is patently systematic and the texts seem to have been found with the aid of a concordance. Moreover, the Matins psalms were borrowed from the Common of the Blessed Virgin. Nevertheless, it does contain some very beautiful passages, especially the hymns, and the lessons taken from St. Bernard. An example:

"Not in vain does the Holy Spirit compare the Name of the Bridegroom with oil when He makes the bride say to the Bridegroom: Your Name is as oil poured out. For oil gives light, nourishment, and ointment. It is *light* and *food* and *medicine*. See, all this applies to the Bridegroom . . . Did not God in the *light* of this Name call us to a wonderful light, so that Paul says: You were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord? The Name of Jesus is also *food*. Are you not often strengthened when you meditate on it? All spiritual food is dry if it is not seasoned with this salt. Jesus is honey to the mouth, sweet song to the ear, joyful delight to the heart. He also is its *medicine*. Is someone sad among you, let Jesus come into his heart and from there leap to his lips; and behold, as the light of His Name arises, all clouds pass, and cheerfulness returns."

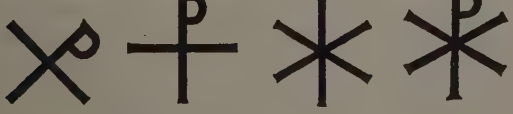
Scripture Reading (Acts of the Apostles, ch. 3 and 4). The account of the healing of the man born lame is read because of the well-known passage on the Name of Jesus.

3. Holy Mass (In Nomine Jesu) is a sacrifice of praise in honor of the most Holy Name of Jesus. The *Introit* unveils a magnificent adoration scene; the threefold kingdom of God, the triumphant, the struggling, and the suffering Church falls down on its knees before the Lord enthroned in glory, for He bears the Name Jesus. The *Oration* petitions for the everlasting enjoyment of the vision of the Lord in heaven whose Name we vene-

rate upon earth. The *Epistle,* culled from St. Peter's apology after the cure of the lame man, tells us: "In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified, whom God has raised from the dead, this man stands before you sound . . . for no other Name under heaven is given to men by which we can be saved." Continuing the Epistle, which concluded with *salvos fieri* (can be saved), the *Gradual* asks God to save us, *Salvos fac nos* (save us).

Today's *Alleluia* is truly a song of praise (*alleluia* means *Praise the Lord*): "My mouth shall proclaim the praise of the Lord, and all flesh shall praise His Holy Name." The *Gospel* is the same as on Circumcision; the Lord receives the Name Jesus, given Him by the mouth of the angel before He was conceived. The two Eucharistic processional hymns (*Off.* and *Comm.*) are songs of praise to the Name of the Lord (both from Ps. 85). The *Secret* and *Postcommunion* characterize the Mass as a "sacrifice in honor of the Name Jesus to the Divine Majesty"; it is an approach that departs from ancient Christian sacrificial prayer forms. A good resolution today would be: I will say the customary conclusion of the Church's prayers, "Through our Lord Jesus Christ," with greater reverence and devotion.

4. Monogram for the Divine Name. According to the ancient mind, a person's name was the expression of his nature, work, or mission. Early Christians accordingly used our Savior's Name to bring to mind His adorable Person; and in their art they gave it the following shortened or symbolic forms:



a) The Chi-Rho Symbol. The oldest monuments bearing this symbol date to the third century, the first being found on a burial inscription of a consul from the year 369. From the third century

we have the following authentic forms: (1) the separate letters IX (Jesus Christ), XP (Christ); (2) the superimposed letters (Jesus Christ), which archeology usually calls the pre-Constantinian Christ monogram; (Christ) called the Constantinian Christ symbol (but this merely means that the former occurs more frequently before Emperor Constantine, the latter from his time); (3) the monogram cross. After his victory at the Milvian Bridge (313), Constantine ordered the Christ-symbol placed on his military banner (*labarum*), on helmets and coins; that used was, of course, already familiar to Christians. However, the vision with the promise, *In hoc signo vinces*, and its glorious fulfillment, raised it to an independent symbol of Christ's victory.

After the triumph of Christianity, the Chi-Rho monogram spread into all countries and found manifold use. It no longer served as a mere abbreviation of the sacred Name, but stood as a symbol for Christ the King. Artists often surrounded it with a laurel wreath or a circle. This signified Christ's dominion over the world, or His triumph over all enemies of His kingdom. Gradually the monogram received the most varied forms and was richly adorned; for instance, it was often embellished by and A and ω (or also Ω) to express our Lord's eternity or divinity.

b) The IHS Symbol. The familiar abbreviation IHS is a symbol of the Name Jesus which has retained its popularity down through the centuries. It owes its spread to St. Bernardine of Siena, who had it placed on his banner, surrounded with twelve rays of the sun and surmounted by a cross. It soon became the most popular monogram for the holy Name of Jesus. By his fervent words St. Bernardine persuaded many priests to place the letters on altars or on the interior and exterior walls of churches. Many Italian cities responded to his efforts and put the monogram in large letters on the outer walls of their town halls, as may still be seen in Siena.

What is its derivation? IHC is the abbreviation of the Greek

IHΣOUΣ, i.e., Jesus (the first three letters of the word). The older form for the Greek sigma, S, resembled our capital C. In Christian antiquity this monogram does not occur too frequently and may not be older than the fifth century. In recent centuries the IHS has been falsely interpreted as *Jesus Hominum Salvator,* or even *Jesu humilis societas* (and regarded as a colophon for the Society of Jesus). Another interpretation that is sometimes made is *In Hoc Signo* (*vinces*), and out of the added *v* (for *vinces*) three nails are formed.

c) Ichthys. The early Church loved another monogram for our Savior's name, the widely-used ICHTHYS. Christ's full title was (in Greek): *Iesous Christos Theou Yos Soter,* Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior. The initial letters of these five words form the Greek word ICHTHYS, which means fish. For this reason Christ is often pictured as a fish. Thus both the abbreviation and the picture became for the early Christians a secret symbol for the Redeemer. Yes, they even call our Lord "the great and pure Fish" (Aberkios tomb inscription, about 180). Tertullian presupposed popular familiarity with the fish symbol when he wrote about 200: "We (Christians) are born as little fishes in water after the model of our *Ichthys* Jesus Christ" (*On Baptism,* ch. 1).

d) The Cross as a Symbol for the Divine Name. The similarity between the Chi-Rho symbol and the Cross is so apparent that it was not long before the two became related artistically. The Cross and the divine Name serve as symbols of redemption, and as a means of protection against the attacks of the demons. Thus it became customary to put the cruciform monogram on doors and houses. One of the more common methods for the cruciform arrangement involved the use of the two words φῶς and ζωή (light and life), terms which Christ applied to Himself in John 8:12; 11:25. Jesus is our Light and Life, for He gives us divine faith and grace. The liturgy desires, prays for, and obtains light and life for the living and the dead. Here we have the reason why the combination of the two concepts, light and life, in the form of a cross became such a popular word symbol in the early

Church and is frequently found on doors of houses (Syria), on tombs, and also on ampullas, terracotta lamps, and other articles.

January 2

Scripture Reading (Rom. 5:1–11). Continuing his exposition, Paul stresses the positive aspects of his position. The glad tidings of the Gospel give the believer a firm confidence that he will weather the coming judgment and attain life everlasting. "Because we have been justified by faith, let us have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Him also we have attained access to the grace which we now enjoy, and boast in the hope of sharing God's glory. Not only this, we boast also in tribulations, because we know that tribulation produces patience, patience endurance, endurance hope. Hope will not permit us to be put to shame, for the charity of God is poured forth into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. . . . But God has manifested His charity to us in this that when we were still sinners, Christ died for us. How much more will we, after being justified by His blood, be saved from wrath through Him. For if we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son when we were enemies, how much more certainly after being reconciled, will we be saved by (sharing in) His life." In the following verses Paul contrasts Adam and Christ as the ancestors of two classes of men, that of the sinners and condemned to death, and that of the redeemed and destined unto life.

January 3

Scripture Reading (Rom. 6:1–23). Paul shows how the Christian really has nothing more in common with sin; for (1) the old man was buried with Christ in baptism and a new man rose out of the waters; (2) he was crucified with Christ and rises with Him from the tomb. It follows necessarily that he ought be for-

ever dead to sin: "How can we who have died to sin still live in it? Or do you not know that all who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death that, just as Christ was raised from the dead, we might walk in newness of life through the glory of the Father. For if we are grown together with Him in the likeness of death, then we will also be so in the likeness of His resurrection. This we know, that our old self was crucified with Him that the body of sin may be destroyed, in order that we may no longer serve sin . . . But if we have died with Christ, then we will also, so we believe, live with Him. . . ." (Here the connection between Easter and baptism is clearly expressed, as it was practiced in the liturgy from the earliest times.)

These thoughts Paul develops further by a comparison with the slave relationship. Formerly we served sin as our mistress; the results were deeds which we now regret, and the end, death. At present we are serving another mistress, justice. And our dedication must be wholehearted, absolute. The fruit now is a holy life, the end eternal happiness. "For the wages of sin is death, but God's gift of grace brings eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

January 4

Scripture Reading (Rom. 7:1–25). Paul reverts to the topic of Mosaic Law. The truth that all that happened to Christ also happens in a mystical way to His members is helpful in understanding a Christian's relation to the Law. The Christian is freed from the Law because he died when Christ died and now serves God truly (1–7). In the following verses (8–25) Paul speaks of unredeemed man, in whom two powers struggle for supremacy, (a) the inner man or one's better nature which knows and approves what is good; (b) the flesh, in which evil concupiscence and therefore sin have their roots. The Law could not prevail

over the power of sinful nature. The grace of Christ alone gives deliverance.

"I know that in me, or more correctly, in my flesh, there dwells nothing good. The willingness was always with me, but not the accomplishment of the good. For I do not do the good that I wish to do, yet I perform the evil that I do not wish . . . I see another law in my members at war against the law of my mind and making me prisoner to the law of sin that is in my members. Miserable wretch that I am! Who will deliver me from this death-laden body? Thanks be to God! It has been achieved through Jesus Christ our Lord."

January 5

Today Christmas with its train of feasts comes to an end. Tomorrow the season reaches its second zenith with the feast of Epiphany. Christmas, the commemoration of Christ's nativity, began with a vigil, Christmas eve; then, with ever-increasing crescendo the mystery continued on through the three Masses of the feast; on through the three feasts on following days; on through the Sunday within the octave and the octave day itself. Nor was that the end. For the feast of the Holy Name enlarged on the octave, and these last four days, with the Mass of January 1, were a soft finale to the Christmas mystery.

Scripture Reading (Rom. 8:1–39). What the Law was unable to achieve, God has accomplished through Christ. He assumed our sinful flesh and in it suffered death on the Cross. By this means the demands of justice, that sinful flesh deserves death, were satisfied. For the Christian the impact of sinful flesh and death is nullified by God's gift of the Holy Spirit who gives the new foundation of divine life in baptism. And at the resurrection He will also raise up the physical body unto eternal life (1–11).

The possession of the Holy Spirit not only binds us unto a life

in harmony with the Spirit, but also gives all needed strength. He is the guarantee of future glory (12–30). Now the Christian may be sure of his salvation. God is his Father, Christ his Brother, and in his own soul he bears a love for his Lord that is stronger than all hostile power upon and beyond this earth. Chapter 8 is the climax of the entire Epistle. "All who are driven by the Spirit of God are the sons of God. You have received the Spirit of sonship by which we cry: Abba, Father! The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. But if children, then heirs also, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ; for if we suffer with Him we will be glorified with Him. For I maintain that the sufferings of the present time are as nothing over against the future glory that will be revealed in us."

St. Telesphorus (127–137). "At Rome, Pope St. Telesphorus. After much torturing he suffered death under Antoninus Pius, a glorious witness to the Christian faith" (*Martyrology*). St. Irenaeus called him "an illustrious martyr" (*Contra Haeret.* 3, 3). His remains are interred in the Vatican. This first feast of a martyred pope in the new year reminds us that many vicars of Christ since Peter have died for their Master. We commend ourselves to all these "glorious witnesses to the Christian faith."

Preparation for Epiphany. Even though the vigil of Epiphany has been officially abolished, it still remains spiritually beneficial to devote some time and effort toward conditioning our mind and heart for the great feast. This is the aim of the following reflections.

Epiphany, the appearance of the Lord! Even the word sounds strange to us of the West. Christmas is our feast. Its charm even the unbelieving world cannot escape. It is simply "flesh of our flesh." But Epiphany? To make it more palatable some areas in Europe transformed it into the feast of the Three Kings; and as such it has become popular. But the concept and meaning of Epiphany seemingly remains foreign. What distinguishes Christmas from Epiphany? In the Divine Office St. Leo the Great answers with classic brevity: "Whom the Virgin brought forth on Christmas, the world acknowledged today."

On Christmas we celebrated an historical event, the birth of Christ. Indeed, behind this event lay a tremendous truth, redemption through the incarnation — which, of course, was reserved for those who looked more deeply. In general, people rejoiced over the fact that Christ was born to us; and they stood about the crib with happy hearts. Epiphany, primarily, is not an event, but a dogma or a truth which only becomes concrete in the events of our Lord's life. The truth or dogma commemorated is this: mankind is acknowledging Christ as God; as God Christ appears to men. We can, therefore, combine the two feasts in one short formula: *On Christmas God appeared as man, on Epiphany this Man manifests Himself as God to the world.*

Christmas is the feast of the incarnation, the Messiah's appearance as man; Epiphany is the feast of His appearance as God. That Christ became man requires no proof; He merely had to be born, to live as man among men. But that this Man, this helpless Child, is God — for this proof is needed. And His birth would avail us nothing if we were not convinced of His divinity. Thus to the feast of His coming as man it was necessary to add the feast of His appearance as God. The prolog to the Fourth Gospel would seem to have anticipated the double mystery and the two feasts: "And the Word was made flesh (Christmas), and we saw His glory, glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father (Epiphany)."

Epiphany, accordingly, furnishes evidence that the man Jesus is God's Son. We may ask, how could the Messiah authenticate His claims? Only by signs and miracles. Actually all of Christ's miracles upon earth had this one aim, to prove to men that He is the Son of God. Some miracles He worked expressly for this purpose, e.g., the cure of the paralytic, "that you may know that the Son of Man has power to forgive sins. . . ." Hence the whole of the Savior's earthly life was an epiphany, His appearance as God before the world. We could readily cite numerous miracles in proof of tomorrow's mystery. But the Church has chosen only three such wonderful facts to show that God has appeared among us. Briefly and beautifully the liturgy tells us:

The holy day we are keeping is adorned with three mysteries:
this day a star led the Magi to the manger;
this day wine was made from water;
this day at the Jordan Christ willed to be baptized in order to save us, alleluia.

(*Ant. of 2. Vespers*)

Indeed, these episodes are not in themselves compelling; grace on God's part and faith on ours must be added. A star rose for the Magi. Grace worked within them and led them to faith and to the acknowledgment of the Babe's divinity. Thus Epiphany is at the same time a feast of faith and a feast of grace.

Now we see why the Magi mystery was selected and given precedence, especially in the West. The Magi were the first pagans called unto faith in the Son of God; they are our representatives; like ourselves, they came from paganism. Epiphany is the feast of faith of the heathen world. We are celebrating our vocation to faith.

A further application. Ever since Christ's death the Church provides proof of His appearance as God. Not so much by miracles, however, as by offering God's word in the Scriptures and in sermons. Nor is such proof immediately compelling; there is need of grace and faith. However, in the midst of an unbelieving world the Church proclaims two facts to those who have grace and faith: God became Man (Christmas) and manifested His divinity to the world (Epiphany).

January 6

THE EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

Station at St. Peter

Behold, the Lord the Ruler is come (advenit)! *The Kingdom is in His hand, and power, and dominion* (Introit).

With these words the Church proclaims that today's feast brings to a perfect fulfillment all the purposes of Advent. Epiphany, therefore, marks the liturgical zenith of the Advent-Christmas season.

"Rejoice in the Lord, my dearly beloved brethren; again I say, rejoice. For it is but a few days since the solemnity of the birth of Christ, and already the world is illumined by the feast of His manifestation. On this feastday the world acknowledges Him who was born of a Virgin on the former feast" (*Matins: Sermon of Pope St. Leo*).

1. **First Vespers** provide the solemn overture to the feast. The antiphons give us the clues to the principal themes. "Begotten before the day-star and before all ages, the Lord our Savior has appeared this day to the world." In brief, we here have stated the main reason for the feast, viz., in Jesus, the man of Nazareth, God eternal has manifested Himself to mankind.

Then, turning to the city Jerusalem, the liturgy heralds the jubilant message: "Your light is come, Jerusalem, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you; and the Gentiles shall walk in your light, alleluia." Throughout Advent the Church was astir with preparation and anticipation; now all is fulfilled as Jerusalem receives her Light, her Spouse.

From this supra-temporal imagery we move on to historical settings: "Opening their treasures, the Magi offered Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, alleluia." The fourth antiphon introduces the second major feast-theme, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan, as it summons all bodies of water to a common hymn of praise: "O ye seas and rivers, bless the Lord; O ye fountains, sing a hymn to the Lord, alleluia." Such is the artistry of the liturgy — one figure or image coalesces with another. The final antiphon reverts to the Magi mystery: "Like a flame of fire that star pointed out God, the King of kings; the Magi saw it and offered gifts to the great King." The purpose or symbolism of the star is evident; to the Magi it was God's call unto faith and grace.

The Chapter again addresses Jerusalem, for the Holy City today experiences her great visitation, the crowning fulfillment of Advent. Stanza by stanza the Hymn develops the day's three principal mysteries. First, we see the Magi making their way to the divine Child while Herod vainly fears the loss of his throne: "He takes not earthly realms away, who gives the crown that lasts for aye." Secondly, the Lamb of God descends into the waters of the Jordan to cleanse us of our sins. Lastly, at Cana we witness the waters blush into wine. Echoing the Wise Men, in the Magnificat antiphon we joyfully proclaim: "This is the sign of the great King! Let us go and seek Him, and let us bring Him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh, alleluia." A magnificent choice for an antiphon! It suggests the finishing touch to our preparations for the feast, as it almost bids us: Come, let us be off to join the Magi journeying to Bethlehem.

2. Message and Purpose of the Feast. For the second time in the Advent-Christmas season the liturgy's solemn observances

reach high tide. If December twenty-fifth is Christendom's family feast and a time for home gatherings, Epiphany is the official, universal solemnity for the Catholic Church. As already intimated, the feast's basic message pertains less to the historical event from the infancy of Jesus than to the implications of the great "epiphany," viz., the Son of God becoming manifest to the world. Three historical episodes are employed to illustrate this truth: (a) the adoration of the Magi; (b) the baptism of Jesus; (c) the miracle at the Cana wedding. Among Christians of the East, it is the second of these episodes, the baptism of Jesus, that is stressed (hence the name "Jordan Feast"). The Western Church prefers the first, the adoration of the Magi, and often calls Epiphany the "Feast of the Three Kings."

Our understanding of Epiphany will gain in depth and dimension if we consider some of the ways and manners of the Orientals, especially of times past. When, for example, an Oriental ruler paid a state visit to one of his cities, he was greeted with great color and fanfare. He appeared in full regal pomp and splendor; his visit was a lavish occasion, marked by feasting and reveling and the granting of privileges — all at the ruler's request and expense. Such festive visitations came to be known as a *theophany or epiphany*, i.e., "an appearance of god" — as if the divinity had come to earth. When the Son of God appeared among men, there was an *epiphany* in the truest sense of the word. A divine King, He "appeared" to His city, the Church, manifesting His glory. The inhabitants of the city (the Church) give Him triumphant welcome, while He prepares for them a Eucharistic Banquet.

Another Oriental custom bearing on the feast of Epiphany involves the celebration of marriage. In the East weddings were very festive occasions, lasting through several days. So great was the Oriental's delight in marriage festivities that he would picture the joys of heaven in terms of a wedding feast. As a result, nuptial imagery occurs frequently in both Scripture and the liturgy. Christ comes into our world as a bridegroom; the redemption is His marriage with the Church; and the Eucharist

is His marriage banquet. The feast of the Epiphany employs both Oriental notions. Christ the divine King pays a visit to His city and celebrates His marriage to His bride, the Church. To this wedding we, God's children, have been invited; and joyfully we join in the wedding Repast.

The nuptial theme is artfully woven into the Benedictus antiphon, yet so as to give prominence not merely to one but to all three mysteries proper to the feast. The composition, metrical in structure, is a free adaptation from an original Greek hymn. It reads as follows:

Hodie caelesti Sponso	This day the Church is joined
Juncta est Ecclesia,	to her heavenly Spouse,
Quoniam in Jordane lavit	for Christ has cleansed away
Christus ejus crimina.	her crimes in the Jordan;
Currunt cum muneribus	with gifts the Magi hasten
Magi ad regales nuptias	to the royal nuptials,
Et ex aqua facto vino	and the guests are gladdened
Laetantur convivae.	with wine made from water.
Alleluia.	Alleluia.

This antiphon bespeaks the hand of a skilled writer. With the nuptial scene as background it outlines not only the three major themes of Epiphany but gives in broad strokes the Church's sacramental life: Baptism—Offertory—Eucharistic Banquet. In baptism each soul is espoused to Christ, becoming His bride without spot or wrinkle; in the Eucharistic Sacrifice Christ consummates the holy union. Our spiritual oblation at Mass, symbolized by the material gifts we bear to the altar at the Offertory, is a gift worthy of our King as well as appropriate for the wedding feast (holy Mass). In the sacrificial Banquet these gifts are repossessed, infinitely enhanced, rejoicing the partakers of the divinely-transmuted Wine (Eucharist).

Accordingly, as portrayed in the great feasts of the winter cycle, the work of redemption proceeds along two major lines, birth and espousal. Christmas means Christ's birth and our rebirth in Him. Epiphany mirrors Christ's espousal to the Church

and to individual souls. Epiphany, moreover, places considerable stress on yet another theme, that of light. This is why so much space is devoted to the star of the Magi (note, too, the Epistle of the Mass, a splendid passage from Isaias beginning with "Arise, *be enlightened* (illuminare), O Jerusalem."

On the feast itself no hard and fast order is adhered to in the Breviary with respect to the sequence of the three mysteries. Taking the whole Epiphany period into consideration, however, some respect is accorded to historical order. Thus, on the feast itself the liturgy stresses the event that, historically speaking, came first, the adoration of the Magi. On the Sunday within the octave it focuses attention on the twelve-year-old Jesus amid the doctors in the temple, suggesting through the medium of this Gospel the transition of Jesus from boyhood to His public ministry. Next, on the octave day the liturgy centers our thoughts on the baptism in the Jordan; and, lastly in this series of events, on the second Sunday after Epiphany we commemorate the wedding at Cana. The oldest element in the composition of the present feast is, without doubt, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. Ample evidence is had in the Hour of Matins (see, for example, the psalms and responsories of the first nocturn).

3. Divine Office. Devoted liturgists will encourage lay participation in the Divine Office, at least on the greater feasts and during the more important seasons. Note how many of the antiphons are keynoted by the word *adorare,* to adore. With the Magi as inspiration, the Office of Epiphany brings us to our knees in adoration of the Son of God. In general, we may characterize today's Matins as a comprehensive invitatory, that is, an adoration of Christ under the aegis of the Magi. The Hour, accordingly, begins at once with the psalms, the first two of which (Psalms 28 and 45) clearly advert to the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan.

The Lessons in the first nocturn are from Isaias, a point that shows the feast's connection with Advent. The three selections were made with reference to the three mysteries proper to Epiphany: the baptism of Jesus ("All you that thirst, come to the waters . . ."); the adoration of the Magi ("All they from Saba

shall come . . ."); and the wedding at Cana ("As a bridegroom . . ."). The first two responsories describe the baptism of Jesus. The psalms of the second and third nocturns are splendid examples of worship prayers. The lessons of the second and the third nocturns give portions from two historically significant sermons delivered on this feast in the basilica of St. Peter by two great Popes, Leo I and Gregory the Great. The first of these provides excellent material for prayerful reading.

"Rejoice in the Lord, my dearly beloved brethren; again I say, rejoice. For it is but a few days since the solemnity of the birth of Christ, and the world is already illumined by the feast of His manifestation. On this feast day the world acknowledges Him who was born of a Virgin on the former feast. The Word made flesh so ordained His manifestation that as a newborn Infant He would be known to believers, but hidden from persecutors. Already on Christmas the heavens were resplendent with the glory of God, and the sound of His truth went forth to all the earth when an army of angels appeared to the shepherds as messengers of the newborn Savior and the guiding star began leading the Magi to adore Him.

"Then it was that the birth of the true King shone over the world, from the rising of the sun even to its setting. For, through the Magi both the East learned the truth of this great event, and the Roman Empire was not left in ignorance. Herod, alarmed, sought to crush the life of the infant King; and, though unaware of it himself, his very cruelty was to be an unwitting instrument in the service of divine Providence. Pursuing his evil designs against the Child he knew not, he decreed the indiscriminate slaughter of infants; but his sacrilegious outrage merely served to make known to all the world the heaven-told tidings of the Savior's birth. Both by the depravity of this cruel oppressor and by the miraculous celestial light, men were the more impelled and emboldened to speak of what they had seen and heard. Then, moreover, the Savior was borne into Egypt so that by this secret grace those people who were so fastly bound to all manner of error and evil might receive their call to impending

salvation. Thus it happened that, while yet steeped in the error of superstition, the Egyptians were to play host to Him who is the Truth.

"Let us therefore acknowledge, beloved brethren, in the adoration of the Magi the first sign of our calling and of our faith; and let us celebrate with glad hearts the beginnings of our blessed hope. From now on we enter our eternal heritage; and the truth which the Jews in the blindness of their hearts did not receive, casts its light on all nations. Let us fittingly honor this most sacred day on which the Author of our salvation appeared. He whom the Magi worshipped as an Infant in a crib we will adore as omnipotent King of heaven; and as from their treasury they gave mystical gifts to the Lord, so let us also from the treasury of our hearts offer gifts that are worthy of God."

4. Announcing the Dates for the Movable Feasts of the Year 1960. In cathedral and monastic churches (also, one hopes, in liturgically-slanted parishes) there occurs today the solemn announcement of the dates for the principal movable feasts of the coming year. This announcement, after the Gospel of the principal Mass, is given the following form:

> Beloved brethren, as we have recently rejoiced over the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ, now through the mercy of God we must tell you about the happiness that will stem from the resurrection of that same Lord and Savior:
>
> February 14 will be Septuagesima Sunday.
>
> March 2 will be Ash Wednesday, the beginning of the holy forty-day fast.
>
> On April 17 we will joyfully celebrate the holy feast of Easter, the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.
>
> May 26: the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ.
>
> June 5: the feast of Pentecost.
>
> June 16: the feast of Corpus Christi.

> November 27 will be the first Sunday of the Advent season of our Lord Jesus Christ; to Him be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.[1]

There is good reason and sound pedagogy in this proclamation of coming feasts; for as the Christmas season now reaches its zenith, the Church deftly focuses attention to future mysteries by pointing out the principal solemnities of the next period, Easter-Pentecost.

4. Holy Mass (Ecce advenit). If we regard the Divine Office on Epiphany as a single prolonged act of adoration, we may compare the Mass to a sacrificial procession, with the Magi in the lead. Very appropriately the station church is the basilica of St. Peter, for by this means the liturgy indicates the universal character of the feast, a mystery embracing all mankind. Every nation and race is present by implication. As the pope and attending clergy enter, we greet our divine King who now appears to His city (the Church). For today the purposes of Advent find perfect fulfillment with the Lord's arrival: "Behold, the Lord the Ruler is come (*advenit*)" — so begins the *Introit*, and it continues with a verse from Psalm 71, the "Three Kings Psalm," which, like a refrain, will echo through the Mass.

In balanced phrases a beautiful *Collect* unravels the meaning of today's Mass-mystery; we, it indicates, are the Magi, guided by the star of faith and grace in our journey to Christ through the wilderness of this life, through the persecutions of Herod (i.e., the devil). There is this difference, however; we go to meet, not Christ the Infant of Bethlehem, but Christ the King in the glory of His Second Coming, a coming that is now forewrought in the Mass, even as it was foreshadowed, as to its outward signs, in the extraordinary experiences granted to the Magi (star — Infant; sacred Host — glorified Savior).

In the *Epistle* the light-theme, already heard in the Collect,

[1] This arrangement of dates is merely an example, applying to the year 1960. For other years the reader may consult the current ordinal or liturgical calendar; or more simply, the table of movable feasts commonly given in daily Missals.

swells into a mighty crescendo. From the prophet Isaias comes a vivid portrayal of the messianic kingdom. The holy City (God's Church) glows with a divine radiance, for this is the day of the King's *parousia,* the royal visit. Though darkness covers the earth, the city of the Great King is bathed in light, attracting Gentile multitudes. Coming in countless caravans, they seek to walk steadfast in the splendor of this divine light; and they come bearing gifts, kingly gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.

Like an echo, the *Gradual* repeats the two main ideas of the Epistle, light and gifts; while the *Alleluia* chant anticipates the Gospel by culling out its cardinal passage, the verse that expresses the same two thoughts, light and gifts. Thus, the Gradual and the Alleluia act as links to the Epistle and the Gospel — an excellent exemplification of the nature of these two transitional chants.

In the story of the Magi (*Gospel*) the prophet's vision became reality for the first time. But that story was not to remain an historical episode merely. Our very actions during the Gospel prove the opposite; for when we kneel at the words, "falling down they worshipped Him," we bear witness that we are not only listening to the narrative, but that we are, in fact, identifying ourselves with the Magi. Holy Mass repeats the scene at Bethlehem, makes it actual here and now. See, the Offertory procession is taking shape; we join in eagerly and with the Magi proceed to the altar. We too are kings, and our gifts today are kingly gifts. But we also represent the whole Gentile world who come to pay homage to the divine King (the complete text of Psalm 71 three times repeats the verse: "All nations will serve Him"). Note again how well the *Offertory* chant is suited to an Offertory procession.

It is in the *Secret,* however, that the deepest meaning of the Magi gifts is most clearly stated. Those gifts now yield to that which they foreshadowed; the Church's sacrificial Offering is more precious than gold, frankincense, and myrrh — it is Christ Himself. Our offering is Christ, mirrored in our hearts in the gold-like purity of the love that attends our oblation; our offer-

ing is Christ, immolated like frankincense; our offering is Christ, received at the sacrificial Banquet and penetrating our inmost soul like myrrh. At the *Communion* we have come with the Magi to the goal of our journey. The star that once shone on high shines now within our hearts; and having found the Lord, we worship Him (using the full text of Psalm 71, the "Magi Psalm").

Brief as they were, the explanations given above should be sufficient to show that virtually every text, whether chant or prayer, was selected and positioned according to the best classical standards; that the chants provide genuine accompaniment to their respective processions; that the message of the text is harmoniously related to the external action, e.g., Introit: the Magi enter; Offertory: they come bearing gifts; Communion: they adore their Lord.

Another classic touch is seen in the two readings which run parallel as prophecy and fulfillment. Then, too, the Gradual and Alleluia verses stress respectively the dominant ideas of the Epistle and Gospel, a typical classical turn. Lastly, both Collect and Secret elucidate succinctly, yet in masterful fashion, the profound mystery of the Gospel drama. In short, the Epiphany Mass is without doubt a prime example of a formulary successfully embodying the best liturgical standards.

Among other things, today's Mass exemplifies the value and meaning of the ancient Offertory procession. The Offertory procession provides an opportunity of identifying ourselves with the sacrifice of Christ. Our offering represents our person; in other words, we offer ourselves. Today, moreover, we should make a special offering, one that includes all our going and coming during the year; and we ought bring gifts that match gold in preciousness, frankincense in holiness, and bitter myrrh in willing submissiveness to the divine Infant. In certain communities this day serves as an occasion for still another offering, one material in nature, viz., pieces of gold and silver are brought for the poor; incense for use during the coming year; and medical supplies for the sick and the suffering.

6. Home Customs Associated with Epiphany. Christians of the Greek Church have a solemn blessing of holy water today, including a procession to a convenient lake or stream. In some churches of the West it is customary to bless "Magi water," which the faithful take home with them. Such blessed water is a sacramental, a means unto supernatural healing, purification, and protection. Underlying these practices is the idea of the renewal of baptismal purity; for in the Orient Epiphany was one of the official occasions for administering holy baptism.

In some regions it is customary to bless gold, incense, and myrrh; and, at times, chalk or crayon. Other laudable and devout practices include the blessing of homes on Epiphany, sprinkling them with "Magi water," burning blessed incense and censing the various rooms in the house, inscribing the door sills with blessed chalk or crayon. These blessings are performed by a priest or, in his absence, by the father of the house. They can be made the occasion for a family celebration. When all is ready, the members gather around the family altar glimmering in the light of its candles. The children bring the Magi water, incense, and chalk. In a censer or some suitable container coals lie burning. The leader prays the following prayer slowly so that all may grasp its rich message: "O Lord, almighty God, bless this house that it may become a shelter of health, chastity, self-conquest, humility, goodness, mildness, obedience to the Commandments, and thanksgiving to God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Upon this house and those who dwell herein may Thy blessing remain forever. Through Christ our Lord. Amen." [1]

In recent decades there has been a revival of the custom to stage dramatic performances based on the Magi story. Children love it and take great delight in dressing like the Wise Men and giving their own interpretation of the Gospel narrative. These skits leave a deep impression and one of great religious value. Our parochial schools should lead in this revival of Gospel dramatiza-

[1] A full description of Epiphany home practices together with all the needed prayer-texts is given in the pamphlet *Christmas to Candlemas in a Catholic Home,* available from *The Liturgical Press*, Collegeville, Minn. (20¢).

tion, thus preparing our future fathers and mothers to re-introduce into our Catholic homes age-old methods of teaching the Bible.

January 7

SECOND DAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Gold to the King,
Frankincense to the true God,
and Myrrh for His burial

Although the octave of Epiphany has been technically abolished, nevertheless portions of the Epiphany Office have been retained in practically all the Hours. Because of this fact we here continue to speak of the octave of the feast and include reflections on its mysteries.

1. Divine Office. In the Hours of the Divine Office we continue to find new insights on truths pertaining to the rich Epiphany mystery. If we live in close harmony with the spirit of the liturgy, we will want to take part all day long in the liturgical re-presentation of the events commemorated. Such participation is made easier if we try to remember the antiphons of the Day Hours, particularly Lauds and Vespers.

Prime: the great appearance of Him who was begotten before the day-star. *Terce*: the journey of the Wise Men guided by the light of the star. *Sext*: the Magi offer their gifts. *None*: we visit and worship the Son of God. The *Benedictus* and *Magnificat* antiphons change with each day of the octave. At sunrise today the Church lifts her voice to sing: "From the Orient the Magi came to Bethlehem in order to worship the Lord. Opening their treasures, they offered Him precious gifts: gold, as to a great King; frankincense, as to the true God; and myrrh for His burial, alleluia" (*Ben. Ant.*). At sunset: "Seeing the star, the Magi rejoiced exceedingly; and entering the house, they offered the Lord gold, frankincense and myrrh, alleluia" (*Magn. Ant.*).

2. Symbolism of the Gifts Brought by the Magi. The liturgical texts repeatedly refer to the gifts the Magi brought to Jesus and their symbolism. The following responsory is one example:

Three precious gifts the Magi brought to the Lord on this very day;
and they are full of mystic meanings:
gold shows the King's power;
frankincense makes us think of the great High Priest;
myrrh points forward to the Lord's burial.

On the significance of the gifts Pope St. Gregory the Great wrote as follows:

"For a king gold is a fitting gift; to God incense is offered; and with myrrh the bodies of the dead are embalmed. By their mystic gifts the Magi, therefore, reveal the nature of Him whom they adore; to their King they offer gold; to their God they present incense; and to One dedicated to death, myrrh.

"It should also be our resolve to offer gold to the newborn Lord and thereby show our faith in Him as King of heaven and earth. It should be our resolve to offer Him incense as evidence of our belief that He who appeared in time was God from all eternity. And it should be our resolve to bring Him myrrh in token of our conviction that He who could not suffer in His Godhead could die in the human nature that He assumed.

"Other interpretations, too, may be attached to the gifts the Magi brought. Gold often denotes wisdom, as Solomon implied when he said: A most desirable treasure reposes in the mouth of the wise. Frankincense, which is burnt in honor of God, may be associated with the virtue of habitual prayer, as is evident from the psalmist's words: Let my prayer, O Lord, come like incense before You. And myrrh symbolizes well the mortification of our flesh. Therefore, Holy Church says of her valiant servants who struggle in God's service unto death: From my hands trickles myrrh."

The mystical application of the Magi's gifts was put into verse by the priest Juvencus (about 330):

Thus, aurum, myrrham,
Regique, hominique, Deoque dona ferunt.
To Him as Man, God, and King,
Gold, frankincense, and myrrh they bring.

3. Scripture Reading (Rom. ch. 9–12).[1] During Advent Isaias unfurled before our eyes a prophetic vision of the kingdom of God; in the Epistle to the Romans St. Paul affords us an opportunity to contemplate the full glory and splendor of that kingdom. The essentials are covered in chapters 1–8. In chapters 9–11, Paul wrestles with the historical problem of Israel's rejection, endeavoring to understand it in the light of God's whole plan of salvation. Paul, we see, is not a turncoat vis-a-vis his own people, he clings to them with a burning love. Like Moses he would willingly, as he says, have accepted his own reprobation if it could have effected the salvation of his people:

"I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience, guided by the Holy Spirit, bears witness within me that I have great sadness and continual sorrow in my heart. Yes, I could even wish that I myself should be cut off from Christ if it would be for the good of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh. They are Israelites; to them belong the promises; to them belong the fathers from whom the Messiah is descended according to the flesh — He is God over all, blessed forever. Amen."

Paul then shows how admission into the kingdom of grace is not determined by physical ancestry but by a free act of God, the divine call to grace. The history of the Old Testament furnishes numerous examples of divine election, e.g., not Esau, the firstborn, but Jacob who came after him received the messianic promises. Before either had been born or had done any act of good or evil, Rebecca was told that the elder would serve the younger; for divine predestination is utterly free in its arrangements, God's choice does not depend upon works but wholly upon His own

[1] The Epistle to the Romans is read on those days within the octave that precede the Sunday within the octave. Otherwise the Lessons are from the First Epistle to the Corinthians.

good pleasure. Therefore we find written: "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated."

Next (9:14–30) Paul writes on the topic of divine predestination. "O man, who are you to summon God to judgment? Does the object molded say to the molder, why have you made me so? Doesn't the potter have the right over his clay to make from the same lump both a noble vessel and an ignoble one?"

However, Paul does see a ray of hope in the future. Israel is not utterly rejected. After the Gentiles as a whole have accepted the faith, then the day of grace will dawn upon Israel too: "A temporary blindness only has come upon Israel to last until the Gentiles in full number have entered. Then all Israel will be saved." This wonderful denouement to the history of mankind evokes from the apostle a cry of praise over God's eternal decrees: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, how unfathomable His ways!"

January 8

THIRD DAY AFTER EPIPHANY

You have appeared, O Christ, the Light from Light!

1. Divine Office. Lauds come to a climax with the antiphon: "Three kinds of gifts the Magi brought; gold, to the Lord; frankincense and myrrh, to the Son of God, our great King, alleluia." At sundown the Church sings: "You have appeared, O Christ, the Light from Light! To You the Magi offer gifts, alleluia, alleluia, alleluia" (a beautiful little song of praise).

The *Collect* for the feast of Epiphany translates and applies the drama of the Wise Men to our spiritual lives. When the Magi saw the star, they immediately began their journey, and were rewarded in finding the divine Christ-Child. In your life and in mine there is a counterpart to that star, that journey, that goal.

As the Light from the light You have appeared,

O CHRIST! to You the Magi offer Gifts ✚

The *star* that has risen for us is grace from God's viewpoint, faith from ours. Without that star we would not be Christians. How grateful we should be that out of millions upon millions God has chosen and called us to the faith, even as He chose the Magi. Faith itself is a grace from God, not the product or reward of personal effort. But we must foster and develop it; we may not squander it away. High in your spiritual sky that star is beaming; let it be your guide, your compass.

Secondly, there is the *journey*. This is our life on earth. The Magi followed the star. They left their homeland amid, most likely, the ridicule of friends and neighbors. They made their way through desert and wilderness, over mountain and valley. There were obstacles, Herod in particular. Not inappropriately is that journey a symbol of Christian life. We, too, must leave our homeland, the comfortable homeland of the flesh. We must be strangers and pilgrims in the world. And the road we must follow is a difficult one, not at all the broad, beckoning turnpike of the world. It is no pleasure tour over a smiling countryside; rather an arduous march through storm-swept steppes. Here, too, Herod lurks, bent on quenching the star and queering the way — Satan.

And whither does it lead, this road of ours? Our *goal* is Christ — not, to be sure, Christ at Bethlehem, but Christ coming on the clouds of glory at the end of time, anticipated by His coming at death. This goal must ever be kept in mind. The life of the Christian knows no other finis but the parousia. Anything else, be it ever so worthy or holy, leads only astray. Not even the care of souls or the work of the apostolate may displace our ultimate goal. If there is anything the liturgy should teach us, it is longing for the true finis to human life, meeting Christ in glory. We see, then, how deeply significant is the popular custom of inscribing the names of the Magi above the main door in homes. It says, in effect, that the whole year is a Magi journey in which we are guided by the star of grace to the goal, Christ Jesus our glorified Lord.

2. **Our Gift of Gold.** Place yourself in the role of the first Wise

Men today and think out ways in which you can bring *gold* to the King present in our midst. What, in other words, can you give Him as gold? First and foremost, *love*. A love that glitters like gold, true and pure as gold; a love like that of which Christ said: "You must love the Lord your God with your whole heart, with your whole soul, with your whole strength, and with your whole mind"; a love such as moved St. Paul to exclaim boldly, daringly: "What shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

Our love is our fidelity, proved by a steadfastness that does not fail in times of misfortune, affliction, disappointment. It is faithfulness unto death. Our love also means honesty and sincerity in thought and intention, our inward heart corresponding to our outward bearing. Men we may deceive, not God. The world likes to gild a lie, to veneer and whitewash evil. But the Christian must be different. He must be honest and upright in every thread of his being; no cheap alloy for him, no dross, only gold pure and fire-tried.

There is yet another gold, the gold that we are privileged to lay upon the altar. It is earth's most precious gift; as the Secret tells us, it is Christ Jesus Himself whom we offer to our heavenly Father in the holy Sacrifice and "who in these (symbolical) gifts is offered, immolated, and eaten." Yes, the holy Eucharist is the true gold that never loses luster; and we have the privilege to offer God this gold. Try to realize what a sublime act holy Mass is! It is our greatest royal gift, and by it we become "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy offspring" (1 Pet. 2:9).

3. Scripture Reading (Rom. 12:1–16). We have come to that portion of Paul's epistle devoted to exhortation and practical admonition, a portion easy to understand and immediately related to moral improvement. Chapter 12, from which the lessons for Matins today are taken, contains such excellent material that the Church uses most of it in the Epistles on the first two Sundays after Epiphany.

"I adjure you, my brethren, for the sake of God's mercy, do present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. It will be a reasonable worship from you to your God."

Such should be our gold, and these days after Epiphany provide excellent occasion to offer it. Paul then continues with some magnificent insights on the corporate life of Christians:

"We all are one body in Christ, every one being a member endowed with varying gifts."

On this Mystical Body foundation he builds his moral theology:

"Love must be genuine. Be men and women who hate what is evil, who hold to what is good, who love each other with brotherly love, who in showing respect outdo one another . . . Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, persevering in prayer. Share the needs of the saints (the Christians), be eager to extend hospitality. Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep . . . Whenever it is possible and to the limit of your ability, be at peace with all men . . . Do not be overcome by evil, but win out over evil with good."

January 9

FOURTH DAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Our incense

1. Divine Office. When the sun (nature's symbol for Christ) appears in the east, it is the time for the *Benedictus* antiphon: "We have seen His star in the East (!) and have come with gifts to adore the Lord."

At Vespers: "Herod kept asking the Magi: What miracle have you seen indicating the birth of a king? We have seen a radiant star, and its brightness illumines the world."

2. Our Incense. Today, in company with the second Magus, we bring incense to our Savior. In the liturgy incense symbolizes adoration and worship of Christ. At the Gospel in a solemn High Mass and at the Offertory we bring burning incense to the Lord:

and also in the so-called extraliturgical cult of the Eucharist incense is used in token of our homage. In offering incense the Christian community seeks to express lively faith not only in the divinity of Jesus but also in the real presence of the God-Man in the holy mysteries. This faith should be more than mere theoretical belief; it must be warm and living, a faith that glows spontaneously in the presence of sacred mysteries; a faith that sees Christ standing among us, speaking to us at the Gospel; a faith unhindered by the Eucharistic veil as it leaps to the Godhead beneath. May our incense offering symbolize such faith.

Incense also symbolizes prayer. "Let my prayer, O Lord, come like incense before You." Daily this versicle forms part of the Church's prayer at Vespers. Our incense offering, then, will be a gift of special prayer to the Lord. Prayer is a very personal act, rising from the soul to God; and it becomes more pure and perfect to the degree that it wells up from the depths of one's heart. Prayer is also a community debt owed to God, a debt that should be paid in proper form. The liturgy shows us how. For the most pleasing prayer in God's sight is and remains the Church's prayer prayed in union with her; such prayer actually is the prayer of Christ, the mystical Christ whose Body is the Church. Today, we will dedicate with incense our liturgical prayer to Christ our Lord.

3. Scripture Reading (Rom. 13–14). Paul discusses the Christian position in regard to the state and to civil authority:

"Let everyone be subject to the civil authorities. For there is no authority that is not from God; and where there is authority, it has been appointed by God. Therefore he who resists authority resists the order of God . . . Therefore one must be subject to it, not only for fear of punishment, but also for conscience' sake. Here too you have the reason why you pay tribute; it is because those in charge of that task are God's ministers. Give to all men what you owe them: tribute to whom you owe tribute, taxes to whom taxes, fear to whom fear, and honor to whom honor."

In fewest words Paul has outlined the whole Christian program of conduct vis-a-vis the state and political authority. The

passage is a very practical commentary on our Lord's immortal words: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."

4. **Saint of the Day.** The *Martyrology:* "At Arezzo in Tuscany (middle Italy), Pope St. Gregory X. He was a native of Piacenza (upper Italy) and archdeacon of Liège until he was elevated to the papal chair. He convoked the second Council of Lyons and there succeeded in effecting the reunion of the Eastern schismatics and thus brought to an end dissension among Christian peoples. To the recovery of the Holy Land he lent his most earnest support. His rule was inspired by the noblest aims." His reign: 1271–76; his death: January 10, 1276.

January 10

FIFTH DAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Prayer, work, suffering — incense, gold, myrrh

1. **Divine Office.** Throughout the day our thoughts turn easily to the gifts we take to the Lord. *Ben. Ant.*: "All the nations will come from afar bringing their gifts, alleluia." *Magn. Ant.*: "All from Saba are coming! They bring gold and frankincense, alleluia."

Our Myrrh. Together with the third Magus, we today offer myrrh. What does this bitter, aromatic substance symbolize? More than anything else it stands for a vivid faith in Christ *crucified*. Never can it be over-emphasized that the Mass makes the crucifixion a present reality in which we take part: "As often as you eat this bread . . . you show forth the death of the Lord, until His Second Advent." In another place Paul insisted that he knew nothing except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. How thoroughly are you imbued with grateful love toward your crucified Lord? Can you say with Paul that you "bear the scars of the Lord Jesus in your body"?

According to certain Fathers of the Church, myrrh signifies the mortification of the flesh (*carnis mortificatio*). Because ours is a fallen nature, we must regard the flesh as an adversary with whom there may be no truce or alliance. If anyone does not deny himself and daily take up his cross, he cannot be Christ's disciple.

Lastly, myrrh typifies the sorrows and sufferings of life. The basic ingredients of Christian life are three: work, prayer, suffering — gold, incense, myrrh. Without doubt, the noblest of these is suffering borne in humble resignation and in union with the crucified Savior. Today, each day, we will lay this gift on the altar at the Offertory. It will no longer be our suffering then; it will be part and parcel of the suffering of Christ, of the Mystical Body; and through such corporate suffering it will become possible for us to "fill up what is lacking (of suffering) in the Body of Christ." Only preferred souls, our faith tells us, are chosen by God to help carry the cross of the mystical Christ. Suffering is martyrdom, and the Church prizes nothing more highly.

2. **Scripture Reading.** The Apostle of the Gentiles discusses the nature of Christian tolerance (Rom. 14:1–13). Certainly no one is better qualified than Paul to teach us the meaning of genuine Christian tolerance that never yields an iota on principle yet knows how to reach all men through love. Himself the victim of bigoted opposition even from fellow Christians, he remained undaunted in the desire to be a Jew to the Jews, a Gentile to the Gentiles, "all things to all men." Thus we cannot help being impressed when he writes:

"No one among us lives just for himself, and no one dies just by himself. For, if we live, we live in the Lord; and if we die, we die in the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For this did Christ die and live again, that He might rule over both the living and the dead . . . Therefore, let us not judge one another; strive rather to avoid scandal and offense to a brother."

January 11

SIXTH DAY AFTER EPIPHANY

The first-fruits of the Gentiles

1. Divine Office. Until the recent changes in the rubrics governing the Divine Office, the following homily was read at Matins. St. Fulgentius, its author (see p. 216 for another very beautiful sermon by the same saint) was bishop of the small maritime city of Ruspe in North Africa (d. 532).

"In the Old Law God commanded that the first-fruits be offered in His honor. Now when the same God had been born as man, He consecrated to His service the first-fruits of the nations. Of the Jews, shepherds were the first-fruits; the Magi became the first-fruits of the Gentiles. The former were brought to the manger from near-by, the latter from afar off. Where is He, they inquire, who is born King of the Jews? Sons had already been born to Herod, the king of the Jews. Archelaus had been born in a palace, Christ in a stable. When Archelaus was born he was placed in a golden bed; Christ, however, was put in a very narrow manger. And yet he who was born in the palace was despised, while He who was born in the stable was sought for; the one was not so much as named by the Magi, the Other when found was humbly adored.

"Who is this King of the Jews? He is poor and He is rich; He is lowly and He is eminent. Who is this King of the Jews who is carried as an Infant and adored as God? In the manger He is tiny, in the heavens immense; in tatters He seems of trifling value, but He is greatest wealth among the stars. Why is it that you are so wrought up, O Herod? This King who has just been born has not come to conquer kings in battle, but wondrously to bring all under His yoke by dying. Neither has He been born to be your successor, but that the world may believe firmly in Him. He has come, not to fight when alive, but when slain to triumph. This Child, whom the Magi call King of the Jews, is the Creator and Lord of the angels. You tremble, Herod, at the

birth of this tiny Child; fear rather the almighty power of the Judge. Do not fear this Child as a successor to your throne, but fear Him as a most just Judge who condemns your unbelief."

The antiphon at the Benedictus gives a new slant to the Epiphany mystery: "They who had been reviling You will come to You and will adore Your footprints." Reference is to the conversion of the Gentiles and of persecutors — Saul, for example. At Vespers we watch the Magi leave, their mission accomplished: "Warned in sleep, the Magi returned to their country by another way."

2. Scripture Reading. Paul continues his instruction on tolerance or mutual forbearance (Rom. 15:1–16). (These reflections are particularly opportune on the feast of Epiphany with its message of mankind's reconciliation to God.) The apostle illustrates his teaching by citing the example of Jesus:

"Now we who are strong must bear the weaknesses of the weak, and not strive to please ourselves. Everyone among us should please his neighbor, doing good to him for his spiritual improvement. Christ did not seek His own pleasure, but rather, as is written: The reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen upon Me."

Some verses later Paul explains the relationship of the Jews and Gentiles to Christ (the passage occurs as the Epistle on the second Sunday of Advent; today we read it in a new light). Christ was born a Jew because of God's fidelity (that had been divinely promised) while the Gentiles can praise Him on account of God's mercy (because they have been called without merit of their own or promise from God). Before concluding his epistle, Paul reveals his plans for the future. After years of missionary labor in the East, he longs to journey to the distant West:

"Since I plan on going to Spain, I intend to see you in passing; and after enjoying your hospitality for a time, you may bid me God's speed to that country . . . I am sure that when I come to you, I will come with the fullness of Christ's blessing."

January 12

SEVENTH DAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Great indeed is the mystery of love visible in the flesh

1. Divine Office. With a strikingly modern approach the eloquent preacher, St. John Chrysostom, offers some edifying reflections on the Magi's sterling faith (in the third nocturn lessons until the recent Breviary reform).

"Entering the house the Magi saw the Child and Mary His mother. And prostrating, they adored Him. Then opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh. What, one wonders, moved them to adore the Child? Outwardly, there was nothing unusual about the Virgin; and the house, too, was far from impressive. In other respects, also, there was nothing to fill them with wonder or impel them to adoration. Nevertheless, they not only adored, but brought out treasures and offered gifts, such gifts as one proffers not to a man but only to God. For frankincense and myrrh are pre-eminently associated with divinity. What, then, inspired their behavior? The same reason that caused them to leave their homes and undertake their hazardous journey, namely, the star and the enlightenment imparted to their hearts by God Himself. And this it was that little by little led them to perfect understanding.

"Had it not been so, they would never have paid such high honors, because all that could be seen there appeared very commonplace. What appeared to their senses was of no importance outwardly, the crib, the hut, a poor mother. Now the reason why all this happened as it did, was that *you* might be struck by the Magi's eminent wisdom and learn that they came not merely to a man but to God, and what is more, to God as man's Benefactor. Therefore the Wise Men were not offended by outward appearances but worshipped and presented gifts — gifts, I say, that differed greatly from those which the Jews in their grossness were using. They did not immolate a sheep or goat but made a spiritual oblation in harmony with the highest ideals

of the Church. For they offered the Infant their wisdom, their obedience, and their love.

"In a dream they were warned not to return to Herod. Accordingly they went back home by another way. Here observe their great faith. Not only did they take no offense, but they were perfectly calm and obedient, yielding to no confusion of mind or manner. Nor did they complain to one another, saying, for example: 'Tell me, is this Child really somebody, and does he have any sort of true power? If so, why this flight, this secret departure? We came openly and trustingly to this great people, and stood before the raging king. Why does the angel send us away now like fugitives?' But they did not think or talk in such a way. And thereby their faith proved itself genuine, since they did not ask a reason for the command but simply obeyed."

The antiphon at daybreak may be a fragment from a very ancient liturgical hymn; it is quoted already by St. Paul in his letter to Timothy (1 Tim. 3:16):

> Great indeed is the mystery of love.
> He became visible in the flesh,
> was vindicated by the (Holy) Spirit,
> was seen by the angels,
> proclaimed to the nations,
> believed in throughout the world,
> and taken up into glory, alleluia.

2. The Star as a Symbol. In all ages the stars have attracted man's attention and frequently have been regarded as messengers of a higher world. In the star-studded firmament the psalmist admired the glory and the grandeur of God. Other passages in Sacred Scripture link the stars to God Himself. In Balaam's prophecy, for instance, the Messiah was alluded to as a star: "A star shall rise out of Jacob "(Num. 25:17). In the Apocalypse Christ calls Himself "the bright morning star" (Apoc. 22:16). It was not by chance that a star led the Magi to the Savior. Apostles, bishops and teachers are compared to stars in the Bible. And, equally noteworthy, the saints and the just in heaven are called

stars; from Christ, the heavenly Sun, they receive their radiant brightness as they shine in eternal glory.

Following the lead of Sacred Scripture, early Christian art employed the star as a symbol of (a) Christ (frequently combining it with the Chi-Rho emblem; similarly, the star of Bethlehem was often drawn so as to incorporate the pre-Constantinian Christ-monogram); (b) the Second Coming or the parousia (and paradise). For this reason numerous burial vaults and mausoleums are found decorated with stars. A good example is the renowned mausoleum of Galla Placidia in Ravenna, the whole ceiling of which is sprinkled with stars on a blue background, and in the center glitters a large Latin cross. It is an impressive, artistic representation of Christ's Second Coming and of heavenly glory. Frequently interspersed with stars are other emblems of Christ, e.g., the wreath of victory and the anchor, all telling the same message of Christ and eternal glory.

May the stars as messengers of the world above inspire us to raise our sights beyond earthly horizons. May they be to us the heralds of a higher order and a better life: "Do all things without grumbling or questioning, that you may be blameless and without guile, God's faultless children in the midst of the corrupt and perverted generation in which you shine as stars" (Phil. 2:14f).

3. Scripture Reading (Rom. 16:1–24). The last chapter of the Epistle to the Romans contains various greetings and concluding admonitions: "Greet one another with a holy kiss; all the churches of Christ greet you." Whether this text influenced the introduction of the kiss of peace into the liturgy as a symbol of brotherly love is hard to say.

"The news of your obedience to the faith has become known everywhere. Therefore, I rejoice over you, and desire that you be wise in regard to good, but guileless in regard to evil . . . Now to Him who has the power to strengthen you in my gospel and in the preaching of Jesus Christ through the revelation of the mystery that lay hidden during long ages but is now openly proclaimed and by the writings of the prophets according to the

decree of the eternal God made known to all nations to bring forth obedience to the faith — to God, who alone is omniscient, be honor forever and ever through Jesus Christ. Amen."

Sunday after Epiphany

THE FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY

The Sunday after the feast of Epiphany represents the transition from Christ's infancy and boyhood to His public life and teaching; while the octave day commemorates the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. Accordingly the Church today selects the incident about the twelve-year-old boy Jesus in the temple. Jesus is still a child as He directs our attention to His future ministry.

However, the very old and very beautiful Sunday Office is at present supplanted by the feast of the Holy Family. The Mass for the Sunday is transferred to the first open day following, usually Monday. We will offer some considerations both on the feast of the Holy Family and on the Mass of the Sunday.

I. THE HOLY FAMILY

Truly, You are a hidden King

1. Orientation. We have seen how the season's liturgy is the product of two different mentalities in Christendom. The West has contributed the touching, soul-warming feast of Christmas with emphasis on the historical birth of Jesus, while the feast of Epiphany, which stresses timeless, transcendental theology, originated in the East. In the course of time the latter broadened out in both East and West. The Eastern Church is primarily responsible for emphasizing the themes of Christ's kingship and

marriage; while it is largely to the Western Church that we owe familiarity with the "mystery of the Magi or the Three Kings."

Now, the feast of the Holy Family shows that not only different parts of the world but also different centuries have contributed to the formation of the liturgy. Most of the feasts of the Christmas cycle (excluding, for instance, the feast of the Holy Name of Jesus) stem from the ancient Church and breathe the spirit of antiquity. Today's celebration, however, is a product of our modern age, the times to which we belong. Here, then, is a good opportunity to compare two feasts of different eras and see what manner of thought and inspiration permeates them. Anyone who prays the Office and Mass of this feast will discover three distinctive new traits: (a) doctrine displaces action; (b) the purpose of the feast is primarily instruction, moral edification; (c) the appeal to feeling and emotion is greater than in the older feasts.

a) The ancient Masses dramatize mystery, something divine is transacted, and the texts are pointed to illustrate what is happening. In ancient liturgy both the Foremass and the Divine Office illustrate and prepare for the reality that takes place in the Sacrifice proper. Quite otherwise the liturgical texts of today's feast which present a meditative consideration of the hidden life of the Holy Family at Nazareth. Matins and the Foremass are only loosely integrated with the Mass proper. What we find are profitable meditations on the hidden King in His life of obscurity and obedience; on our Blessed Mother, Queen and High Priestess of the Family; on St. Joseph, the meek and humble head of the Family. Devote some time to that holy scene; remain close to the Holy Family, seeing Joseph, Mary and Jesus at work and at prayer, in joy and in sorrow.

b) Another point would be the purpose of the feast. The primary reason for its institution was to improve family life, which had suffered greatly because of the first World War. This marks another difference between the new and the old. Not that the older Masses and feasts lack precepts and instructions for practical life; but such was not their primary purpose. The end

and purpose of Christmas, for instance, was Christ's coming in grace and in mystery; the end and purpose of today's liturgy is the spiritual restoration of the family. Liturgically-minded Christians will, of course, respond wholeheartedly to the urgent admonitions of Mother Church. They will foster family spirit and will do all in their power to promote holiness in the home. Nor will they fail to cultivate a family spirit in their parishes and in their communities.

c) Because today's feast places such marked emphasis on meditation and instruction, it should not surprise us to find considerable stress on motivation and emotional appeal. Feeling runs high in many passages. One whose appreciation is not limited to the formal and reserved spirit of classical liturgy will read and ponder these texts, Matins for example, with great satisfaction. The hymns, composed by Pope Leo XIII himself, are genuinely lyrical. The lessons of the first nocturn mirror the virtues proper to the Christian family; with the responsories following as delightful summaries. The lessons of the remaining two nocturns are no less moving and instructive. Thus we see that in the liturgy the Church is like the father of a family who brings forth from his storehouse things "both old and new."

2. Holy Mass (Exsultat gaudio). The Mass text is clear and easily understood. The *Gospel* tells the good news of our Lord's hidden life (the fact that Jesus was separated for a few days from His parents is only incidental). The key verse in the Gospel is: "And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and *was subject to them.*" Here is further evidence that a Gospel may be chosen because of one particular sentence. The *Epistle* lists the virtues that should characterize every Christian family, virtues that were practiced perfectly in the Holy Family of Nazareth, viz., love, humility, patience, peace. And their prayer life is summed up in the words: "Whatever you do in word and work, let it be done in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and be grateful to God the Father through Him." The *Orations* of the Mass (*Coll., Secr., Postc.*) implore the intercession and the protection of the Holy Family and the grace to imitate their high

ideals. The Postcommunion beseeches that Mary and Joseph may come to meet us at the hour of death, and that Christ may receive us into the everlasting abodes.

The chanted texts have a lyrical ring; by them the devout soul is transported in spirit to the humble house at Nazareth, there to see the happy Holy Family: "How blissful is Your dwelling, O Lord of hosts! My soul yearns and longs for the courts of the Lord" (*Intr.*). This exquisitely beautiful psalm (83) the Church applies to the holy home in Galilee. The *Alleluia* chant voices wonder and admiration over the "hidden King, Israel's God and Savior," who dwelt there unknown. The *Offertory* verse was a very appropriate choice; for Christ's presentation was a true offering to the Father, and our own offering is essentially the same. The *Communion* chant affords another fine parallel; as Jesus once "went down with his parents" to Nazareth, so now He comes "down" into our hearts, "and is subject to us."

3. Scripture Reading (1 Cor. ch. 1). The Scripture readings for the first nocturn, an extension of the Epistle at Mass, were specially chosen with reference to the feast. Their burden consists in practical instructions on Christian family life. The Scripture reading proper to the season would be from the opening chapter of St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians. This Letter ranks next to the Epistle to the Romans in importance and length, but its purpose was quite different. Writing to the Romans, St. Paul gave a systematic exposition of Christ's work of salvation, but when he addressed the Corinthians he proceeded without any preconceived plan, simply answering one question after another, and seeking to remove the various obstacles facing his Christian community at Corinth. The Epistle to the Romans gives us the theology of St. Paul, while the Letter to the Corinthians affords a good glimpse into the moral life of a primitive Christian parish. This, actually, is the chief value of the epistle. In Romans it was dogma, here it is morality. Every educated Catholic would profit from a methodical study of the epistle. The Church, however, allots only one week to its reading; and so we must limit our treatment to seven selections of our own

choosing, one for each day, which depict the glory of the kingdom founded by Christ.

Today we will concentrate on the epistle's opening paragraphs. The apostle begins solemnly:

"Paul, through the will of God called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, and his brother Sosthenes wish the church of God at Corinth, those sanctified in Christ Jesus, the saints of election, and all who call upon the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ wherever they as well as we may be, grace and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I am constantly giving thanks to God on your account for the divine grace that was given you in Christ Jesus. Through Him you have been enriched in all things, in every gift of teaching and in all knowledge; for the preaching of Christ has taken a very firm hold among you. Therefore you lack no gift of grace, and may confidently await the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. He also will give you perseverance unto the end so that you may be without reproach on the day of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful; through Him you have been called to intimacy with His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ."

Anyone who reflects upon this introductory passage with loving attention will have no difficulty in discovering both the ideals that motivated the life of the early Christians as well as the enthusiastic fervor stirring the apostle's heart.

After this lofty introduction Paul proceeds at once to strike hard against the spirit of dissension that had broken out among the Corinthians. He sees four factions:

"What I mean is this: individually you say, I follow Paul, or I follow Apollos, or I follow Cephas, or I follow Christ."

Then, as if rebuking their pretended wisdom, he speaks of the foolishness of the Cross:

"For the doctrine of the Cross is foolishness to those who are lost; but to us, the saved, it is a power of God . . . the Jews demand signs, and the Greeks desire wisdom; while we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Gentiles. But to those who are called, whether Jew or

Gentile, we preach Christ, the power of God and the wisdom of God."

4. The Family: a Liturgical Cell. The family is the basic living cell for every society, whether it be the human race, the state, or the Church. The health of any physical organism depends on the condition of the cells. On the moral health of the family depends the well-being of the state and of the Church. We must, therefore, expend every effort to promote and preserve Christian family life. What tragic effects the two world wars have had on the home! How the enemies of the faith have striven to undermine and to poison and corrupt these basic cells of the Christian organism! As a result family life is deteriorating at an alarming pace. In this unhappy state of affairs, what contribution can the liturgical revival make? Can it do anything significant to effect the restoration, the healing of the home? Most assuredly. The liturgy does have much to offer.

In the first place, the liturgy fosters and promotes community life and spirit; it is, in fact, a school which teaches us to be community-minded. Anyone who seeks to be guided by the liturgy must slough off the spirit of selfishness. The sublime and fundamental dogma of the Mystical Body of Christ on which the liturgy rests leads logically to the rehabilitation of the family. The family is the Mystical Body in miniature, one of its constituent cells; and the reality of the Mystical Body can best be seen in the concrete instance of the family. People always seem to regard the Mystical Body as a kind of figure of speech or a comparison; in the family they can see and recognize its reality. Of the family body the father is the head, even as Christ is the Head of the Mystical Body. The mother is the Church, and the children are members.

In a genuine family there is truly but one will and spirit, "one heart and one soul." The daily bread is provided by the father and distributed by the mother; from father and mother, children receive their blood and life. All of which has its wonderful counterpart in Christ's Mystical Body. But it is more than a mere counterpart; it is a symbol vibrant with reality. The father has a tangible share in Christ; he is not only His representative, for

he possesses a measure of Christ's nature and personality. The mother, for her part, shares in the nature of the Church; and the children are constituent members.

Now apply this one great truth to *your* family, and try to put it into practice. It cannot but give new meaning and direction to everything in the home. You children, look up to your father, he is Christ. In him you must see, honor, and love Christ. And you, wife and mother, you too must see Christ in your partner. As father, it is your duty to live like Christ and to rule your family as He would. As mother, your ideal is Christ's spouse. While the children all are members alive with Christ; they are cells in whom Christ must grow, mature, and ripen to full adulthood. One can readily see how noble and thriving family life would become if this fundamental truth of the family as a living replica of the Mystical Body penetrated society.

The above observations provide a partial answer to the question whether the liturgy can contribute anything substantial to the recovery or renewal of family life. Much more could be said. Think how effectively the liturgy could sanctify the family through prayer, through the sacrifice of the Mass, through the sacraments and the observance of the ecclesiastical year. The Divine Office in the family; morning and evening prayer in common; holy Mass together! What power to form and shape the family would be found in the Mass attended and lived out together. All week long such a family would gather sacrifice, toil, suffering, and prayer, to be offered at the Sunday Mass; in the Sunday instructions the members would look for mutual inspiration and encouragement.

Of greatest importance for the family would be the sacraments, and more so if their reception would be shared or noted by all — baptism, first holy Communion, the last rites, perhaps a death in the family. This far-reaching liturgical missionary work in the family falls primarily to the wife and mother. She above all is the one to make her house a church and her family a liturgical community. — N.B. What has been said apropos of the natural (blood) family applies equally well, or even to a

greater degree, to spiritual families, i.e., convents and monasteries.

II. THE SUNDAY MASS

Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?

1. Jesus at Twelve Years of Age. What is the deeper meaning of the above passage from the Gospel of the Sunday Mass? In the feast of the Holy Family the Church holds up the perfect life of the Holy Family as the ideal to be followed; in the Sunday Mass, on the other hand, we celebrate a manifestation (another epiphany) of God as well as an important phase in the redemptive work of Christ. Our Lord manifested His "glory" at the more significant occasions of His life, viz., at His incarnation through the announcement of the angel and the miracle in Elizabeth's house; at His birth through the *Gloria* of the angels and the star of the Magi; at His presentation in the temple through Simeon; in His twelfth year, the year of His attaining full legal (Jewish) age, through the surprising revelation of His mission and the reference to His divinity; at the age of thirty through the manifestation of the Blessed Trinity at His baptism; at the beginning of His public life through the miracle at Cana; and His "glory" likewise was manifested at His death, resurrection, and ascension.

The reason for these manifestations of His glory was to engrave the more momentous steps in the redemptive work indelibly upon the memory of mankind. The Church, faithful to her Master's precept ("Do this in remembrance of Me") commemorates all the salient events of redemption through the Eucharistic sacrifice, and thus each year the whole work of redemption is renewed. On this Sunday our Lord announces His program of redemption: "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" And He uses the occasion to give us the grace to come of age spiritually, a further meaning of the passage.

One more point. In many of those manifestations during the course of our Lord's redemptive life, His Blessed Mother stood close, most often in sorrow and anguish. Such is the case today. And what is its lesson for us? Mary represents the Church; the Church through suffering and participation in Christ's work comes into possession of the graces of redemption and awaits the great, final manifestation of Christ. This Second Coming was prefigured by the finding of the boy Jesus in the temple. Our Mother the Church is now seeking Him "in sorrow." Then when He will have been truly found, that is, when He comes at the parousia, He will say, "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?", that I must be enthroned at My Father's right hand? The holy sacrifice of the Mass is an anticipated actualization of His return; and the feasts of Christmas and Epiphany in particular are radiant projections into the present of Christ's awaited advent.

Do you now see the very profound meaning and message contained in today's Mass? Immediately before us is the episode of Christ's coming-of-age at His first sojourn among men, a prelude to His Second Coming at the end of time. In this sacred drama the Church is the mother who seeks in sorrow and finds in joy.

2. Holy Mass (In excelso throno). When you have come to understand the sublime message of the Sunday Mass and the beauty of its composition, it will be difficult to see how the feast of the Holy Family should permanently supplant it. *Introit*: upon entering the church we behold a majestic epiphany scene; surrounded by angels, Christ sits enthroned and His dominion will last forever. Our acclaim is made in the words of the resurrection psalm (99), for Sunday is Easter in miniature. *Collect*: our noblest task on earth is to do God's will. This thought runs through the entire Mass; the *Epistle,* for instance, bids us to offer our bodies as a living sacrifice that will be holy and pleasing to God. Here Paul has formulated and expressed the inner significance of our Offertory oblation; a thorough moral reform must take place in our lives. The pericope comes to a conclusion with some splendid liturgical observations on the Mystical Body.

Gospel: a theophany in the person of the boy Jesus! His words (the first that have come down to us) show Him to be God's Son; and they summarize His (and our) mission in life, the fulfillment of God's will. At the *Offertory* we come rejoicing into God's presence, i.e., the altar, bringing our gifts of self-surrender and obedience, "a living sacrifice." On our lips again is Psalm 99 (the same psalm is sung four times — an indication of the Mass's antiquity). Note the classic brevity of the *Secret*: our oblation should bring new life and protect us from evil. For a *Communion* verse we chant Christ's first recorded words; the passage sets forth both His program of life and ours. For to carry out God's will is the sublimest task we can perform. In harmony with this thought the *Postcommunion* entreats that the fruit of our Sacrifice may consist in "a manner of life pleasing to God."

January 13

THE BAPTISM OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

The King purifies His Bride in the Jordan

On the eighth day after Epiphany the liturgy places particular stress on the second major mystery of the feast, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. Consideration, evidently, is given to historical sequence, inasmuch as this event forms the bridge from the hidden life of Jesus to the beginning of His public life and teaching.

1. **Divine Office.** St. Gregory Nazianzen voices some beautiful and elevating thoughts on the baptism of Jesus:

"Christ becomes radiant with light! Or better still, He floods us with the brightness of His light. Christ is baptized; let us descend with Him, so that with Him we may also ascend.

"John is baptizing. Jesus comes to him, indeed to sanctify the Baptist, but more particularly to bury the old Adam in the

waters; the principal reason, however, was to sanctify the waters of the Jordan by that act. For as He Himself united spirit and flesh, those who would be baptized in the future should be sanctified through water and the Spirit. The Baptist demurs, Jesus insists. 'I ought to be baptized by You.' So speaks the lamp to the Sun, the voice to the divine Word. Jesus comes up out of the water, bringing aloft the submerged world. He sees heaven not merely parted but opened; for Adam once had closed heaven to himself and to us, his posterity, even as the entrance to paradise was barred by a flaming sword. The Holy Spirit bears witness, because similar things often occur together. From heaven comes testimony, since He came from heaven in whose behalf testimony was being given."

2. Holy Mass (Ecce advenit). In its present form today's Mass text lacks unity and purpose since most of the component parts, particularly the *Chants* and the *Epistle* (from Isaias), pertain to the Magi mystery. Even the *Gospel* only alludes to the baptism of Christ; the account does not give the details that may be found in the Synoptics, for the pericope is an excerpt from the Fourth Gospel. The evangelist John, a disciple of the Baptist, brings in only incidentally the sublime revelation that accompanied the event. What he stresses is the role of the Baptist.

John the Baptist is the "Bridegroom's friend." During Advent he prepared the bride for receiving the divine Spouse; today "he stands in our midst rejoicing with all his heart on hearing the voice of the Bridegroom." He would say: "That joy have I been granted in fullest measure. Now He must increase, I must decrease." Actually Christ will now increase (like the sun) until Pentecost; but to the Baptist there will be no reference until after the summer equinox when the sun begins to decline. Christ is the Bridegroom, the Church the Bride; John the Baptist is the Bridegroom's chaste and humble friend to whom he conducts the Bride. The three belong together.

The *Orations* (*Coll.*, *Secr.*, *Postc.*) are proper to the Mass and deserve consideration for their content and classic form. All three treat the "appearance" of the divine "Light" (actually, they are

the Prayers originally proper to the feast). The *Collect* asks for interior renovation through Christ who assumed our nature. The *Secret* is a true Offertory prayer: Christ, the newborn Son, is the author of our sacrificial gifts; may He also mercifully accept them. *Postcommunion*: With the heavenly light (of grace) may God guide us so that we may contemplate with a clear mind and worthily utilize the Epiphany-*mysterium* which God has deigned to grant us.

3. Reflections on the Day's Mystery. In the life of Christ the baptism in the Jordan is an event of highest importance because it represents a significant phase in the work of redemption. In the course of the ecclesiastical year not only this episode but all the phases of Christ's redemptive work are commemorated in the liturgy. In recent weeks we have celebrated quite a number of important events pertaining to our redemption, viz., the annunciation (*Missa aurea* of Advent), the nativity, the circumcision, Christ's coming-of-age. The baptism at the Jordan marks the beginning of our Lord's public life. Indeed, it seems as if His baptism effected His anointing as the Messiah by the Holy Spirit. Whatever its ultimate significance, the Greek Fathers in particular regarded the event as tremendously important.

In the symbolism of His baptism, Christ displayed beforehand His redemptive death and resurrection. Himself immaculate, He assumes the sins of the world, descends into the purifying waters, and raises mankind to divine sonship. Note that Christ's baptism was vicarious in nature. There He stands in the Jordan in our stead. Consequently, the act must find its true expression in our subjective or personal redemption. Three such occasions would be baptism, holy Mass, death.

At my baptism I was immersed with Christ, and with Him I died and was buried. Then I emerged, and for the first time heaven opened to me as the Holy Spirit made His entrance into my soul; and my Father in heaven glanced down upon me, now "His son, His child."

In each holy Mass Christ's baptism is again operative. Through the holy Sacrifice I am immersed in His sacrificial death; heaven

then opens and the Holy Spirit descends in holy Communion, while through the pledge of the sacrificial Banquet the Father assures me of renewed and enriched sonship in Himself.

The baptism of Christ takes place within me a third time at death, for death is indeed a sort of baptism. Death is like immersion into the dark depths, and when I emerge, it is into heaven above. Then I will see the Blessed Trinity, no longer through the darkened sun-glass of faith, but in immediate vision, face to face.

To sum up, today's liturgy helps me to understand more clearly the basic structure of spiritual life. Christ's death is the foundation. Upon this foundation the edifice rises through baptism and the Eucharist; while the Lord's return at death spells completion to the work.

Scripture Readings during the Week Following the First Sunday after Epiphany

As a rule, the readings from Sacred Scripture are assigned to each day with no regard to the feasts in the Church's calendar; only by way of exception are readings chosen specifically for a feast. Ordinarily, also, the liturgy begins a new Book on Sunday and terminates it on Saturday. From now on until Septuagesima the remaining epistles of St. Paul are read. Since most of these contain only a few chapters, as many as two or three may be covered in a single week. On the presumption that every reader has a Bible, this week (and the weeks following, until Septuagesima) I shall do no more than indicate pertinent readings, quoting passages that are especially important and adding an occasional word of comment. A very commendable practice would be to make these Scripture readings the basis for your daily meditation.

Monday (1 Cor. 7:17ff). Paul's recommendations regarding one's state and condition in life are expressed in the following passage:

"Let each one live as the Lord has given him, in the state to

which God called him. If you were called as a Jew, do not try to dissemble it. If you were called as a Gentile, do not become circumcized. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters, but keeping God's commandments does. Let everyone abide in the state of life to which he was called. If you were a slave when called, do not let it trouble you; and though you could become free, prefer to remain as you are. For he who was called as a slave in the Lord is a freeman of the Lord, even as he who was called as a freeman is a slave of Christ. You have been dearly bought; do not make yourselves the slaves of men. Dear brethren, let each of you remain before God in the state that you were called . . . This, my brethren, I say to you: the time is short. For this reason those who are married should live as though not married; those who sorrow as though not sorrowing; those who rejoice, as though not rejoicing; those who reap possession as though possessing nothing; those having traffic with the world as having it not, for the structure of this world is about to cease. I wish you would be without care and anxiety."

So thought and lived the first Christians; to them life on earth was simply a passage to a much-desired destination. Yet we — we are so earthbound in our living and thinking.

Tuesday (1 Cor. 9:1ff.). Paul's unselfishness as well as his zeal for souls is never seen in better light than in the following passage:

"Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen our Lord Jesus Christ? Are not you my work in the Lord? If to others I am not an apostle, at least to you I most certainly am. In fact, you are the seal upon my apostleship in the Lord. Have I not, then, a right to be supplied with food and drink? Is it only Barnabas and I who do not have the right to forego manual labor? Who ever served in war at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard and does not eat of its fruit? Who pastures a flock and does not drink of the milk? . . . If I have sown spiritual seed among you, would it be something so unusual if from you I should reap earthly fruit? Nevertheless, I have not used that right; I provide everything at my own expense so as not to create any hindrance to the

gospel of Christ. Nor do I write these things hoping that in the future such should be done to me. I would rather die than ———. No one will take my boast from me.

"For preaching the gospel I take no great credit; it is my duty. Where, then, lies my reward? In the fact that I preach the gospel at no one's expense, and do not avail myself of my right in its regard. And though in all respects I am a freeman, I yet have made myself a slave to all in order to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became a Jew so as to win the Jews. To those who are under the Law I became as one under the Law (even though I am no longer under the Law), so as to win those who are under the Law. Among those who are not bound by the Law, I became as one living without obligations to the Law (even though I am not released from the law of God, and, what is more, I am bound to the law of Christ), so as to win those who do not live under the Law. *I became all things to all men, so that by whatever means I might save some.* I do everything for the sake of the gospel, and to have part in it."

The second last sentence (in italics) might well be called St. Paul's program of life.

Wednesday (1 Cor. 11:17ff.). Paul denounces a very grave misbehavior on the part of the Christian community in Corinth, the unworthy celebration of the holy Eucharist. In St. Paul's time (and even later) this celebration was still combined with the *agape*, the so-called "love feast." Christians would gather at the home of some wealthy believer. Everyone brought something for the evening meal, all serving one another and taking special interest in the poor. After the meal they celebrated the Eucharist and received the Body and Blood of the Lord. But at Corinth certain of the more wealthy brought along food and drink and consumed it among themselves, with little thought or concern for others. For this misconduct St. Paul reproved them. In order to impress upon them how greatly at fault they were, he called their attention to the manner and moment of the institution of the most holy Sacrament.

"I have received from the Lord what I have also conveyed to

you. On the night He was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and said, 'This is My body that will be given up for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In like manner, after the repast, He took the chalice and said, 'This chalice is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For, as often as you eat this bread and drink this chalice, you show forth the death of the Lord until He comes again.' "

It is a passage of inestimable value to us; for it gives the most detailed description of the celebration of Mass in apostolic times. Paul then goes on to speak of the unworthy reception of the sacred evening Meal.

Thursday (1 Cor. 12:12ff.). Paul was the foremost Biblical exponent of the Mystical Body doctrine as well as the author of the imagery in which it is cast. Of this subject he here writes in great detail:

"As the body is one yet has many members, and all the members of the body, despite their multiplicity, form but one body, so also it is with Christ. For in baptism we all, whether Jews or Gentiles, slaves or freemen, are united through one Spirit into one body; one Spirit pervades all. The body, too, is not made up of one member, but of many. Though the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,' it would still belong to the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would still belong to the body. If the whole body were only an eye, where would be the hearing? And if all the body were ear, where would be the smelling?

"Now God has so given each member its place in the body as He willed. If all were one member, where would be the body? The fact is that there are many members, yet only one body . . . If one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice together. You are the body of Christ and, considered as parts, His members. God has appointed some in the Church to be apostles, others to be prophets, others to be teachers. . . ."

These pointed remarks of the apostle convey to us a good understanding of the Mystical Body doctrine.

Friday (1 Cor. 13:1–13). Paul becomes lyrical as he pens his celebrated hymn on charity, truly one of the most beautiful passages in all the sacred Books. First, he compares charity with the charismatic gifts that were then so highly coveted:

"If I should speak the speech of men and of angels, but do not have charity, I am like sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And if I should have the gift of divinely-inspired speech, and knew all mysteries together with all knowledge; and if I had all faith so that I could move mountains, but lacked charity, I am nothing. And if all that I have I should turn into alms and deliver my body to be burned, but do not have charity, it avails me nothing."

The apostle enumerates the characteristic qualities of charity as called for in daily life and practice:

"Charity is patient. Charity is kind, not envious, not boastful, not puffed up, does not thrust itself forward. It does not seek its own, does not yield to bitterness, does not harbor evil. It does not rejoice over injustice, but rejoices with the truth. It pardons all things, believes all things, hopes all things, bears all things."

In conclusion, Paul asserts the eternal worth and duration of charity:

"Charity shall never cease, even though prophecies should come to an end, and tongues stop, and knowledge disappear. For our knowledge is patchwork, and patchwork our prophecy. When the fulfillment has come, the patchwork is ended . . . For the present, there remains faith, hope, and charity, these three; the greatest of these is charity. Seek after charity!"

Saturday (1 Cor. 15:1ff.). This chapter is of prime importance because it shows how the foundation of our faith is the resurrection of Christ. Paul first certifies the fact of the resurrection by citing the various appearances of the risen Savior. Then from Christ's resurrection he deduces our own:

"Now, if persons preach that Christ rose from the dead, how can some among you declare that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has

not risen either. But if Christ has not risen, then our preaching is useless, and your faith too is useless . . . For if the dead do not rise, Christ has not risen either. And if Christ has not risen, your faith is useless; you are still in your sins, and those who have fallen asleep in Christ are also lost. If our hope in Christ is limited to this life only, we are of all men the most pitiable. But the fact is that Christ has risen from the dead, the firstborn of those who have fallen asleep. By one man came death, and by one man comes the resurrection of the dead. As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will receive life. Each one has his turn: Christ as the firstborn, then those who belong to Christ at His coming."

Epilogue to the Christmas Cycle

The Sundays After Epiphany

In the liturgical books the solemn feasts of Christmas and Epiphany are followed by six Sundays called "the Sundays after Epiphany," which in some ways form a distinct group. Or better, these Sundays constitute a transitional period between the feasts of the Christmas cycle and the holy season of Lent. We may consider them partly as a feastless liturgical span and partly as a kind of epilogue to the Christmas cycle. The liturgical books designate them (as well as the Sundays after Pentecost) as *tempus per annum* — time through the year — thus indicating that they constitute an interval lacking festive status. Even as to doctrinal and historical content, only the first two Sundays continue the Christmas theme. This is not to say, however, that these Sundays are in no way influenced by the Christmas season, especially by Epiphany. Indeed, the general tone is one of joy and triumph.

The four major themes of these six Sundays are as follows: 1. Still in our midst is the divine King who appeared in His city; we on our part continue to adore Him (characteristic of this first

theme is the *Introit* of the final four Sundays: "Adore the Lord, all you His angels! Sion hears, and the daughters of Judah rejoice. The Lord is King. . . ." Also the *Gradual*: "The Lord has built up Sion, and manifests Himself there in His glory").

2. In the recent festive season Christ once again laid the foundation of God's kingdom; and He entered His city as King and Bridegroom. Now He is engaged in the work of developing that realm. The Church propounds her interpretation of that kingship. The Gospels, accordingly, show Christ active in His kingdom as a Nourisher (second Sunday), as a healing Savior (third Sunday), as a Conqueror (fourth Sunday), as the long-suffering Judge (fifth Sunday), as Architect and Sower of the kingdom (sixth Sunday). Inwardly, God's kingdom is consolidated by love and Christ-like conduct (this is the burden of the Epistle on all these Sundays).

3. The six Sundays also form a transition to the Easter cycle. Already there appear in the background signs of the struggle between *Darkness* and *Light,* even as such have been discernible since Christmas (e.g., fourth Sunday: Gospel of the storm on the sea; fifth Sunday: Gospel of the weeds sown among the good seed).

4. Lastly, one may detect in these Sundays the Easter theme, since every Sunday of the year is a renewal of our Savior's resurrection.

If we would mesh the Gospels of the six Sundays after Epiphany together into one composite lesson, it would be a very edifying one indeed. The most high God, the God of inaccessible majesty, comes to us unhappy men in the garb of man. His desire is to be *Emmanuel,* i.e., God with and among us. It is related of Emperor Joseph II that he used to visit the poor in their hovels, to discover their needs and wants. On these visits he concealed his identity, dressing as an ordinary person. He was afraid that his subjects, overawed by the sight of imperial dress and insignia, might hesitate to approach and freely speak their minds.

Christ's appearance among men is comparable to the Emperor's appearance among his people, though the comparison

limps badly. The splendor of the Godhead would have frightened us away; therefore God came to us in the garb of human nature. He came in the form of a brother and friend so that we should come to Him in all our needs, even as He on His part willed to obtain firsthand knowledge, as it were, of the whole drama and tragedy of mankind. He came to relieve our sorry lot, to free us from the dungeon of hell, from the bondage to the flesh and sin. *Why Christ appeared on earth* is precisely what the Church tells us on the Sundays after Epiphany. Each Sunday has its own special answer.

Christ wishes to be our *Teacher*. He teaches us how we should live, and seeks to transform us into righteous and right-minded men. On the first Sunday He stands before us in His twelfth year; His wisdom belies His youth as He propounds His cardinal precept: "Do you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" The will of God is the cornerstone of God's kingdom.

Christ wishes to be our *Priest*. On the altar of the Cross, as now on the altar of bread, He offered atonement for our sins and wills to be our Mediator and Nourisher. The wedding of Cana is a symbol of the sacrifice of the Mass (second Sunday).

Christ wishes to be our *Physician*. Mankind bleeds from a thousand wounds. He wants to heal them. The leper and the centurion personify all who stand in need of healing (third Sunday).

Christ wishes to be *Conqueror* on our behalf. He is the only one who can overcome sin and Satan. The calming of the storm on the sea portrays His triumph in the Church and in the world (fourth Sunday).

Christ wishes to be the patient, long-suffering *Judge*. Evil must, of course, be uprooted, but in a gentle, prudent way (fifth Sunday).

Christ wishes to be the *Architect* and *Sower* of God's kingdom. His initial work in the world and in the soul may be small and unimpressive, but the eventual result should be tremendous (sixth Sunday).

The second Sunday, moreover, has a subtle connection with

the feast of Epiphany. The Church invites us to a closer view of the feast's third mystery, the wedding at Cana. This episode continues the historical sequence of events in our Lord's life, viz., the adoration of the Magi, Jesus at the age of twelve, the baptism in the Jordan, the wedding at Cana (second Sunday). With it the liturgy introduces us to the acts of our Lord's public life. In the Sundays thereafter until Passiontide, our thoughts and attention will be focused on His activity as teacher and miracle-worker.

THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

The King invites us to His wedding banquet

Epiphany and its primary purpose, the manifestation of Christ to the world, continues today as the liturgy centers our attention on our Savior's first miracle wrought at the wedding of Cana. The Gospel, from which a whole series of edifying lessons may be drawn, ends with the words, "And He *manifested* His glory." What a lovable picture of our Savior emerges from the account! Christ in the midst of smiles and laughter, taking part in a family feast, and thereby making it holy. A wedding occasions His first miracle!

And Mary, too, is present; she is the wonderful woman, the kindly mother helpful at every turn, foreseeing and forestalling every need, modest and discreet, not offended when met with seeming rebuff. What Paul wrote in his celebrated hymn on charity, is best exemplified in Mary. "Charity is patient, is kind, does not yield to bitterness. . . ." Through Mary's intercession the first miracle was worked. Christian commentators have delighted in culling out the Gospel's mystical content; one point comes quickly to mind, the superb Benedictus antiphon on the feast of Epiphany: "This day the Church is joined to her heavenly Spouse. . . ." Christ is the Bridegroom, the Church the

Bride. And every Mass has something of the nature of a marriage and a marriage feast.

1. Divine Office. This Sunday marks the end of the Christmas-Epiphany cycle of feasts and the return to the ordinary *per annum* Office. The psalms portray the citizen of God's kingdom with his daily tasks and duties, his struggles and his sufferings. The lessons of the first nocturn are from the so-called *Scriptura occurrens*, i.e., readings in regular sequence from the Bible and not specially chosen for the occasion. Today the liturgy begins the Second Epistle to the Corinthians. A second nocturn ferverino urges the reading of the Pauline epistles.

In the third nocturn St. Augustine explains the Gospel. His sermon reads in part as follows: "Even those who have vowed virginity to God, though enjoying a higher degree of honor and holiness in the Church, are not without marriage. They, together with the whole Church, are included in that marriage of which Christ is the Bridegroom (for all have entered into mystical nuptials with Him). The reason why our Lord accepted the invitation and came to the wedding was to strengthen conjugal chastity and to show that matrimony is a great mystery-symbol. Furthermore, the bridegroom in that marriage typified the Lord because they said to him, 'You have kept the good wine until now.' The good wine Christ has indeed kept until now, namely, His gospel." Here is an example of the mystical associations that Christian antiquity commonly attached to Biblical texts.

2. Scripture Reading (2 Cor. 1:1–11). The Second Epistle to the Corinthians is St. Paul's masterful apology against those who were trying to alienate the love and loyalty of his converts at Corinth. Though not always easy to understand, the epistle abounds in passages that are inspiring and truly beautiful. The reader whose acquaintance with the Bible is limited would do well to gloss over obscure verses or problems of sequence, devoting full attention to the many excellent and edifying sections. For instance, the introduction to the epistle (used for the Lessons at Matins today) is a wonderful statement of Christian suffering and sympathy:

"Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and of all consolation! He consoles us in all our afflictions, thus enabling us to bring consolation to others in their every affliction, even as we ourselves are consoled by God."

St. John Chrysostom, the great patriarch of Constantinople and an ardent admirer and disciple of St. Paul, urges upon us the devout reading of the Pauline epistles:

"Twice in the week — and not seldom three and four times a week, whenever we celebrate the memory of holy martyrs — I have occasion to listen to the reading of St. Paul's epistles.[1] At the sound of this spiritual trumpet I am filled with joy; and I am greatly moved, and overcome with longing. For in the words that are read I sense the voice of a friend, and I feel as though he were standing before me and I heard him preaching with his own mouth. But at the same time I am grieved and troubled that not all Christians know this great saint as they ought; indeed, some are so ignorant of him that they do not even know the exact number of his epistles. This failure is not due to any natural incompetence but to their unwillingness to have the apostle's writings constantly in their hands.

"We ourselves must acknowledge that whatever we know, if we know anything at all, we do not owe to the excellence or keenness of our understanding, but to this holy man. Him we love with a warm love, and never cease to read his writings. It is with us as with those in love; better than anyone else they know the actions and accomplishments of those whom they love simply because of their constant concern. The holy apostle himself makes the same observation when he says in his epistle to the Philippians: 'It is just and proper to think so of you all because I have you in my heart, both in my chains and in the confirmation and defense of the gospel.'

"If, therefore, you devoted yourselves to sympathetic reading

[1] We have here an indication that at the time of St. John Chrysostom (d. 404) Mass was usually celebrated twice a week, and that the Epistle of the Mass consisted in a "continued reading" from the letters of St. Paul.

of the apostle's writings, you would have no need of seeking anything further. But many of you gathered here must attend to the rearing of children and the care of a wife and the upkeep of a home. You are accordingly no longer able to apply yourselves adequately to this task; but you ought, at least, try hard to assimilate the thoughts that others have gathered. Certainly you could give the sermon as much attention as you do the pursuit of profane interests! It is almost a shame not to ask more of you; yet even this little is very worthwhile."

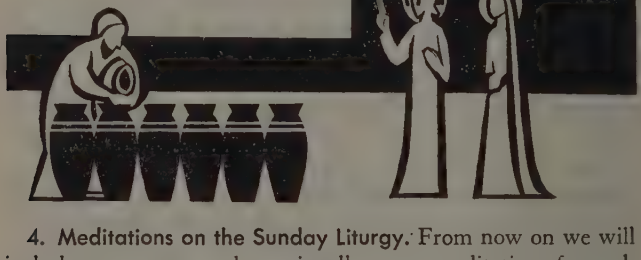
3. Holy Mass (Omnis terra). The Mass opens with a joyous adoration scene. God appears; and we greet Him with a song of homage and adoration (*Intr.*). Psalm 65 is well woven into the Mass formulary (*Intr.*, *Off.*, *Comm.* in the earlier expanded form); it is an Easter hymn and reminds us that Sunday is a little Easter. The *Collect,* a prayer for peace, has little or no connection with the day's major theme (no doubt it dates to the disturbed times of the barbarian invasions). Its timeliness at present is, of course, quite evident.

In the *Epistle*, the Church speaks of the various ecclesiastical offices. Everyone should render a good account of the work or function entrusted to him and not be constantly seeking other positions. The fulfillment of one's calling in life, the wise and prudent restriction of one's efforts to the same, that is the mark of true Christian greatness. In a few pregnant sentences the second half of the Epistle describes the vast areas encompassed by love of neighbor. Thus, the Epistle contains important directives both for the internal and the external growth of the Christian community (lessons that are also implied in the miracle at the wedding).

The *Gradual* links Christmas with Easter; God sent His "Word" (the incarnation) and rescued us from destruction (the redemption). This accounts for the Easter-like exultation of the *Alleluia.* The *Gospel* does not merely offer instruction, rather it illustrates the operation of the sacraments. The Cana miracle is repeated at every Mass, likewise the mystical marriage of the Church with Christ. The *Offertory* continues the theme of Easter

joy (Ps. 65); and the *Secret,* succinct and classical in form, points out the relation between Offertory and Communion: May God sanctify (i.e., consecrate) the gifts we have offered and in return cleanse us of the stain of sin.

The *Communion* exploits the main sentence of the Gospel with telling effect; it implies that in the Sacrifice proper the Gospel story has been performed again *sacramentally.* It is in reference to the Eucharist that the miracle of Cana becomes fully intelligible. How easily we associate "the good wine kept until now" with the mystical realities of grace as we sing the sacred words on our way to the Lord's banquet table. In the *Postcommunion* we beg God to increase and intensify the working of His grace within us; having been strengthened anew by the Eucharist, may we so live as to become worthy of His promises.



4. Meditations on the Sunday Liturgy. From now on we will include one or two, and occasionally more, meditations for each Sunday. These, we hope, will offer further food for spiritual reflection during the week. Sunday's liturgy should leave its impress upon the whole week, its days resembling an octave to a feast.

A. The Wedding at Cana: Its Meaning for Us. Now after the winter cycle's festive period, the Gospel pericopes of the Sunday Masses take on greater importance. What, we may then ask, is the Church's primary purpose in bringing to our attention an act or episode in the life of Jesus, for example, the miracle at the wedding of Cana. As such the miracle was an historical event; and undoubtedly the Church wishes us to reap edification and

instruction from reflecting on the actions and words of Jesus and His Mother. But such is not her primary purpose. *The Church relates a past event, but means to convey a present reality.* What she says, in effect, is this: what occurred 1900 years ago happens to us now in a mystical or sacramental manner, especially through the Sacrifice of the Mass. Christ did not only want to change water into wine 1900 years ago; He repeats the miracle in our presence as He effects a present transformation on a higher plane of being.

In fact, we may even go further and say that our Lord wrought miracles not primarily for the sake of His earthly ministry as such, but with a view to the future. All His miracles, indeed His whole life, should serve as a reflection of His activity in the Church; for the end and purpose of all His work on earth was mankind's salvation. Accordingly, Christ's first miracle, wrought at Cana, is a symbol of what He effects daily in His Church, and what He now seeks to do at our altar. Here, then, lies the real importance of the Gospel account. From the events of Christ's earthly life we learn what He wishes to accomplish among men. And we also learn what is to be our part in these events. The inference is clear; we ought to live ourselves into the Gospel narratives and feel that we are taking an active role. We should regard ourselves, for example, as guests, perhaps even as the bride and bridegroom, at the wedding, with Christ and Mary walking about and talking to us. Externally, of course, it is drama; the reality is the outpouring of grace, the salvation that today floods our souls.

We may next inquire how the liturgy attacks the task of having us truly "re-live" the wedding of Cana. The liturgy employs a twofold means: (a) by means of the Mass an opportunity is provided to make the Cana account "real" again; (b) the Divine Office furnishes an excellent way to remain in its atmosphere and to share in its drama throughout the day.

a) Where in the Mass is the Cana wedding mentioned? In two places: in the Gospel and in the Communion antiphon. Why these two? In the solemn reading of the Gospel the Church is

not merely retelling an event in the life of Christ; rather, she intends to make Christ and His work present "in symbol." For this reason the chanting of the Gospel is surrounded by the highest marks of honor, such as would be proper only to Christ personally present — candles, incense, kissing the book, the sign of the Cross, all in a standing position. In today's Gospel, therefore, the Church transposes into the present, into our very midst, the first miracle of Jesus' public life.

What, secondly, is the Church's purpose in selecting certain passages from the Gospel for her Communion song (which, according to the ancient form, was repeated again and again, perhaps as many as ten times)? Why such chanting at the most sacred moment when the Lord has just entered into innermost union with the soul? Isn't this a diversion and a distraction? Not at all. The Church is simply trying to say: Jesus has truly kept the better wine, the Eucharist, until now; in the holy Sacrifice and in holy Communion the miracle again takes place and in a far more noble manner.

b) In the Divine Office the liturgy provides additional ways of reliving the Gospel account. The Hours of Divine Office are designed to sanctify the day, to enrich it with blessings from beginning to end; but the text also serves to unravel and illustrate the day's message and mystery. In common thought the natural day begins with sunrise and ends with sunset. These terminals are also very sacred moments for the liturgy. For in the sun that illumines sky and earth, the liturgy sees a symbol of the divine Sun, Christ. Sunrise and sunset in the liturgy of the Divine Office are like the foci of an ellipse to which all rays converge. At these two points the Church voices her most sublime thoughts; at these two points she celebrates her two most festive and jubilant Hours, *Lauds* (early morning prayer) and *Vespers* (evening prayer). Moreover, within these two Hours, the climax comes with the *Benedictus* (a salutation to the rising Dawn, *Oriens ex alto*), and the *Magnificat* (a thanksgiving for redemption). How the divine Sun rises and sets daily is told in the respective antiphons.

For an example, let us take this morning's *Benedictus* antiphon: "A wedding took place at Cana of Galilee, and Jesus was there with His Mother." What does the Church intend to convey by these words? Briefly and simply she puts before us the day's Gospel scene as if to say: Here is the wedding, live yourself into it; you are in the company of Jesus and Mary; stay with them all day. To that antiphon is joined the *Benedictus*, evidently indicating that today Christ, the rising, divine Sun, should be seen as the miracle-working Savior of Cana who seeks to bestow on us the redemptive graces mystically implied by that first miracle.

Then, in the evening as the sun is declining in the west, the Church embellishes the *Magnificat* with: "When the wine ran short, Jesus ordered the water jars to be filled with water; and then the water was changed into wine, alleluia." While summarizing the miracle in these words, the Church is telling us: Today you have been given a similar, in fact a much greater grace. The water of your earthiness and sinfulness has been changed into the precious wine of divine life, into Christ Himself. In the Eucharistic mystery, the miracle of Cana has today been re-enacted. From sunrise to sunset give a wholehearted response, with mind and will united in closest intimacy with Jesus and Mary.

B. The "Great Mystery." How much longer, one wonders, before Christians will again spontaneously sense the importance of the sacraments! When will they learn how to receive them as they should be received and how to live by them! By His presence at a wedding and by His miracle over common water, Christ today sanctified matrimony. An opportune occasion, indeed, for every Christian, whether married or single, to scrutinize his attitude toward and understanding of this sacrament. But alas! Even among Christians matrimony has become a very worldly thing. The sad consequences are clearly visible. The promises solemnly made at the altar are lightly and light-heartedly broken. Hands clasped in marriage today become fists tomorrow. Every pastor knows that our people never display greater

spiritual ignorance than with respect to the reception of holy matrimony. Conditions will vary, but in certain areas you will scarcely find one couple in fifty of whom you could say: "Here are two whose approach and appreciation is Catholic 100 per cent."

St. Paul has given to the sacrament of matrimony a wonderful ideal, one upon which married people, whatever their years, should often reflect. "This (i.e., Christian marriage)," he said, "is a sublime *mysterium* — if seen, I mean, in relation to Christ and the Church." Marriage is a deep mystery — is that the apostle's meaning? No; the correct understanding would be more like this: marriage is a reflection of that holy union between Christ and the Church, a reflection or figure that assimilates ontologically in some degree its ideal. Marriage, therefore, has a sublime and magnificent prototype in the supernatural order, namely, the mystical nuptials between Christ and the Church.

St. Paul himself enlarged upon the various points of comparison: "The husband is head of the wife, even as Christ is head of the Church; He is the savior of His body." In this connection, recall a truth basic to the liturgy, the Mystical Body. Christ is the head; from Him the Church, His body, receives all life, all strength, all graces of redemption. "As the Church is subject to Christ, so let wives be to their husbands in all things." Paul draws this conclusion from the underlying analogy.

The wife might feel that Paul's injunction is all in favor of the husband. But the apostle continued the comparison, this time in favor of the wife:

"You men, love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church, delivering Himself up for her so that by the baptism of water He might cleanse and sanctify her; for by this means He wished to present to Himself a glorious Church, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing; rather, she was to be all holy and without blemish. And so husbands are to love their wives as their own bodies."

Paul is right. Husband and wife have equally grave duties in

Teach me Your ways, O LORD,
and Your paths mark
clear for mè ✚

marriage; the wife owes obedience, the husband love. Many difficulties in married life will not be overcome unless man and wife seek their constant inspiration in this exalted image and likeness of their marriage.

What we have said so far, however, pertains more to the natural than to the supernatural status of married life. In other words, the union of Christ and the Church is not merely an image and likeness of marriage; Paul speaks of a great *mysterium*, a term which could be interpreted as a symbol sharing the reality of the object symbolized. St. Paul, therefore, is implying more than a naked simile or comparison. Marriage actually contains something of the substance of its ideal. The husband bears something of the nature and being of Christ; and so the wife need not obey that depraved and ill-tempered individual who perhaps is her partner, but she obeys Christ present in him. Similarly, the husband does not merely love this human being who is his wife; his love must become supernatural, identified with Christ's love for the Church.

What provides the solid basis for so noble a concept of marriage? The sacrament of matrimony. Christians today find it difficult to comprehend and accept sacramental realities. Such lack of insight only proves how far we still are from understanding and appreciating liturgical piety. One of the effects of the sacraments is precisely to transpose the recipient into a higher order or plane of being. Through the sacrament of matrimony the man and the woman are changed. At least in their relationship to each other they become supernaturally elevated, sharing in the union between Christ and the Church. Here, then, we have a good example of two types of spirituality mutually exclusive. The first, subjective piety, is satisfied with mere analogy as it deduces moral instruction and edification. The other, liturgical or objective piety, sees or at least surmises the "great *mysterium*," the "new creature" on a higher plane of being. The same theology would hold for all the sacraments, indeed for everything that pertains to "*be*ing Christian."

C. The Wedding of Cana: Its Message for Women. Let us

remain at Cana, our eyes resting upon the Mother of God. No, we are not going to explain why, apparently, Jesus was so cold and brusque with His Mother. Nor are we going to investigate the meaning of the words, "What is it to Me and to you, woman?" Here we want only to study for a moment the Virgin and Mother, Mary. Mary's bearing in the story shows three qualities that attract our love and affection.

1. *Motherly care.* After Jesus had left His home at Nazareth to begin His public ministry, Mary continued eager to be of help wherever she could. Thus we find her at the wedding, more as a helper than as a guest. See, Mary is at home wherever assistance is needed. In fact, the mark of a good mother is to sense where the pinch lies. Mary knew that the wine was running short, and so she ventured to intercede with her Son. It is her concern that everything proceed smoothly; hence her words to the attendants, bidding them to do whatever Jesus requested. Indeed, Mary is a true mother, attentive to everything, overlooking nothing, thinking least of all of herself.

2. *Humility.* On this occasion, too, Mary was a dutiful handmaid. She accepted her humiliation — if such it was — from Jesus with a calm and quiet heart. She was not grieved; she did not discontinue her efforts but remained solicitous even after apparent failure and rebuff. To be a willing and loving handmaid — here you have the definition of woman's queenship. Wives sometimes take exception to the husband being the head; it would help to remember that a subordinate position does not indicate inferiority. On the contrary, a woman's position is of divine appointment, one, moreover, that has been ennobled by Christ. For He came "not to be served, but to serve." His work of redemption was compounded of humility and obedience.

3. *The virtue of quiet reserve.* Mary was no gossip; she kept her tongue well in check. At Cana her request was brief and humbly made: They have no more wine. The seeming refusal she accepted in peaceful silence, not complaining. Mary "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart." If wives would only learn to cherish and imitate this most pleasing trait in Mary. Most

family quarrels are ignited when the woman's tongue is loosed. Men are prone to anger. Upon the smoldering fire a wife's heated words act as kerosene. — To summarize. Cana's message to woman is the person and example of Mary — helpful, humble, silent.

Scripture Readings during the Week Following the Second Sunday after Epiphany

Monday (2 Cor. 2:12–17). Paul tells of his journey to Troas and then on to Macedonia. His remarks reveal a tender solicitude for souls. We cannot fail to be impressed by these noble words of pastoral care:

"When I arrived at Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and there found a wonderful opportunity in the Lord, I had no rest because I did not meet my brother Titus. Therefore I bade them farewell and left for Macedonia. But thanks be to God! He always permits us to triumph in Christ and makes known through us in every place the good perfume of His knowledge. For we are the fragrance of Christ unto God both among those who are saved and among those who are lost; to the latter indeed a perfume of death unto death, to the former a perfume of life unto life. Who is qualified for such work? At least we are unlike so many who traffic in the word of God; it is with a sincere mind that I always speak, as one sent by God and acting in His presence, (ever) in union with Christ."

Tuesday (2 Cor. 3:1–6). Paul was truly an apostle of Christ. But since he was not called with the others, some persons asked for a "letter of recommendation." This letter, he answers, was his community at Corinth.

"You are our letter of recommendation, written into our heart, understood and read by all men. Yes, you are clearly the Christ-letter we furnish, not written with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on the flesh-tablets of the heart. Such is the confidence we have in Christ toward God. Not as though we were capable of ourselves to think anything as from ourselves; no, our ability comes from God. He it is who has given us the competence to be a minister of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit. For the letter kills, but the spirit bestows life."

Wednesday (2 Cor. 4:5—5:10). Paul describes his sufferings for the sake of Christ, suffering he endures because of his hope in the resurrection.

"We do not preach ourselves but that Christ Jesus is the Lord, and ourselves your servant for the sake of Jesus. For God, who said, 'Out of the darkness let light shine,' He it is who has shone in our heart to give the knowledge of the divine glory that shines on the face of Christ. It is a treasure we carry in earthen vessels in order that so exceedingly great a power will not be attributed to us but to God. On all sides we are afflicted yet not distressed; in need, yet not in despair; persecuted yet not forsaken; oppressed yet not brought to ruin. Continually we bear in our body Jesus' suffering unto death in order that the life of Jesus may likewise be made manifest in our body. For, though still alive, we are constantly handed over to the power of death for the sake of Jesus, that the life of Jesus may be made manifest in our mortal flesh. Thus it is that death works in us as life comes to you."

Thursday (2 Cor. 5:14–6:10). We have here another beautiful passage, part of which we will meet again on the first Sunday in Lent.

"The love of Christ is a compelling force if we consider this: Because One has died for all, then all have died. Yes, He died for all so that the living should no longer live for themselves but unto Him who died and rose for them. . . . If anyone lives in Christ, he is a new creature; the old has ceased — this other, see,

is new. As co-worker with Him, we admonish you not to receive God's grace in vain. For it is written, 'In the time of grace I hear you, in the day of salvation I help you.' Behold, now is the time of grace, now is the day of salvation. We give offense to no one at all that our ministry may not meet with reproach. Instead, in all things we show ourselves as God's servant — through steadfastness in hardships, in needs and anxieties, in stripes, in imprisonments, in riotings, in toilsome labors, in vigils and fastings; in innocence, knowledge, patience, and kindness; with the Holy Spirit, with sincere love; in proclaiming the truth, in the power of God; in the armor of justice both for attack and defense . . . near death, though still living; beaten and bruised yet not killed; sorrowful yet always joyful; a beggar yet enriching many; without possessions and yet in possession of all things."

Friday (2 Cor. 9:6–15). Paul speaks of the blessings that will come to a generous person.

"Mark this well: he who sows meagerly will also reap meagerly; he who sows in the fullness of blessing will also reap in the fullness of blessing. Let each one give as he has determined in his heart, not with grumbling or by compulsion, for God loves the cheerful giver. Now God is powerful enough to bestow on you every gift in abundance in order that you might have plenty in all things, and enough, besides, to perform good works of every kind, according to the word of the Scriptures, 'He scatters abroad and gives to the poor; His justice endures forever.' He who gives the sower his seed and then bread for nourishment, will also give you good seed to sow, and will multiply it, and will let the fruits of your justice grow. Thus, in all things you will become rich for every form of charitable giving."

Saturday (2 Cor. 11:23—12:10). As a conclusion to this epistle may I suggest reading the well-known passage in which St. Paul defends his apostolic ministry. This passage, which is used as the Epistle on Sexagesima Sunday, gives a detailed review of the apostle's life and labors.

THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Gentiles and sinners enter God's kingdom

Beginning this Sunday, no attention is given to the historical sequence of the units culled from the Gospels; the liturgy chooses certain miracles and discourses of our Lord without regard to their chronological order. However, as mentioned above, the Mass formularies are still highly influenced by Epiphany themes. Thus, on successive Sundays Christ appears in His kingdom as the divine Physician (third Sunday), as Conqueror (fourth Sunday), as Judge (fifth Sunday), and as Sower of God's kingdom (sixth Sunday). The idea basic to the third Sunday is: *Gentiles and sinners enter the kingdom of God.* (The Gospels on the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth Sundays are from St. Matthew and follow the given chapter sequence. We here may have a vestige of the *lectio continua*, i.e., the ancient practice of reading the Sunday Gospels continuously, one beginning where the preceding one left off, as still is customary in the Greek Church.)

1. The Divine Office today is plain and simple, as usual with ordinary Sunday Offices during the year. Of special importance are the two readings from Sacred Scripture, the Gospel and the first nocturn lessons. The Gospel finds its usual echo in the *Benedictus* and *Magnificat* antiphons. Somewhat unusual, however, is the fact that both antiphons mention the healing of the

leper, passing over the centurion in silence. "When Jesus had come down from the mountain, behold, a leper came and worshipped Him saying: Lord, if You will it, You can make me clean. He stretched forth His hand, touched him, and said: I will; be made clean" (*Ben. Ant.*). "Lord, if You will it, You can make me clean. And Jesus said: I will; be made clean" (*Magn. Ant.*). By these antiphons the Church indicates that throughout the day I should regard myself as the leper (i.e., the sinner) whom Jesus cleanses.

A second area of importance centers about the Scripture Readings from the Epistle to the Galatians at Matins. St. Augustine comments on the text during the second nocturn.

2. Scripture Reading (Gal. 1:1–14). This week the Church covers two important letters of St. Paul. One is the Epistle to the Galatians, the other the Epistle to the Ephesians. Galatians is a polemic directed against the Judaizers who may be regarded as the first of the great heretics in the Church. The point at issue was whether the Church was bound by the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law. One of St. Paul's chief merits is that he freed the Church once and for all from any such obligation. In Galatians he struck the decisive blow against the Judaizers. The epistle abounds, moreover, in passages that reveal his great love for Christ. From the very first chapter Paul shows himself an able and fearless apologist. After the introductory greeting, he loses no time in getting to the point.

"I am surprised that you allow yourselves to be alienated so quickly from Him who called you through the grace of Christ and turn to another gospel instead. Really there is no other. But supposing that either we or an angel from heaven should preach to you another gospel than the one we made known to you — cursed be such a one! We have just said it, and we say it again: If anyone preaches to you a gospel other than you have received — cursed be such a one!"

Paul continues, telling how he obtained the gospel "not from man, nor learned it through instruction, but received it by a revelation from Jesus Christ."

In the second nocturn St. Augustine discusses the purpose of the Epistle to the Galatians.

"The reason why Paul wrote to the Galatians was this: to let them know that it was due to God's grace that they were no longer under the Law. For, when the grace of the gospel had been preached to them, there were not lacking some among the Jews, who, though Christian in name, did not know how to appreciate the gift of grace. These wanted to remain under the burden of the Law which God had imposed, not on the followers of justice, but on the servants of sin. For, as you know, He gave a just law to unjust men in order to point out their sins, not to take them away. Only the grace of faith operative through love is able to take away sins.

"The Galatians were already established in that grace, but those aforesaid men of the circumcision wanted to put them under the yoke of the Law also. They said that the gospel would be of no benefit to them without circumcision and the other precepts of Jewish Law. And the Galatians had already begun to be suspicious of the apostle Paul who had preached the gospel to them, seeing that in this matter he did not hold to the same rule of conduct as the other apostles. These, you see, were obliging the Gentiles to act like Jews."

3. Holy Mass (Adorate Deum). On the last four Sundays after Epiphany the chants proper to the Mass (Introit, Gradual, Offertory, Communion) remain the same; here we have, accordingly, a strong indication of the mood and temper of the period. In the *Introit* we adore, with reverent joy, Christ the King; He has built up Sion where He is now seen in glory. Psalm 96 is the "theme song" of the Mass. The *Collect* could have come from the lips of the leper and the centurion: "May God stretch forth the right hand of His majesty for our protection." The *Epistle* contains good pointers on the virtue of love: "Do not render evil for evil . . . as far as it is possible, and depends on you, have peace with all men. Do not take revenge. If your enemy is hungry, give him to eat. Do not give in to evil, but overcome evil with good." What excellent directives! Heed them daily.

The *Gradual* resembles a vision of the Last Day. The Gentiles have entered God's kingdom, Sion is completely built, and the Lord is about to return in power and glory, even as He has appeared in the liturgy *mysterium* during Epiphany. The *Gospel* recounts two conversions, with Christ manifesting Himself in each case as the "Healer" (Savior). It is the same role He takes at Mass.

The *Offertory* glorifies the "right hand of the Lord" which was active already in the Collect and Gospel. Humbly, reverently we kiss the Savior's hand, for to our souls also it has brought healing. Our sacrificial offerings should "cleanse us of every blemish as well as sanctify body and soul for the worthy celebration of the holy Sacrifice" (*Secr.*). Thus, to our oblation there is both a negative and a positive aspect, viz., purification and sanctification. The *Communion* verse reminds us to ponder and cherish Christ's words heard in the Gospel. The text itself, however, makes us wonder because it must be derived from another formulary. How did it get into today's Mass? Perhaps this way. Formerly, Wednesday and Friday of each week had a proper Mass, or at least proper Readings (Epistle and Gospel). Presumably, on a Wednesday after Epiphany the Gospel recounted Jesus' visit to Nazareth and occasioned the words of our Communion verse (Luke 4:22). We might mention in passing how desirable it would be to have those ferial Masses restored to the Missal. Pray the *Postcommunion* slowly; it is brief yet so comprehensive: "Great mysteries have You entrusted to us, O Lord; grant also that we may bear corresponding fruit."

4. Sunday Meditations. A. The King, the Bride, the Daughters of Judah. This Sunday takes its inspiration from Epiphany. The three main characters in that mystery appear again today, as is immediately evident from the Introit: "Adore the *Lord*, all you angels; *Sion* hears it and is glad; the *daughters of Judah* shout with joy. The Lord is *King*. . . ." In this scene Christ is the King, the Church is Sion, and we, children of the Church, are the daughters of Judah. Here you have the *dramatis personae* for today's liturgical drama.

a) The leading character is the *King*, Christ. As the drama begins, the *Introit* unfolds a resplendent scene of the *Majestas Domini*, the Lord in majesty, surrounded by angels and the Church's exultant children. Psalm 96, the day's theme song, depicts the King under the awesome beauty of a thunderstorm which brings terror to sinners but "joy" and "light" to the "just." The *Gradual* likewise extols the great King: "The Gentiles shall praise Your Name, and all kings of the earth Your glory. The Lord has built up Sion, and now appears in His majesty." These are genuine Epiphany ideas: the great King is the builder of Sion; He appears for a state visit; all the kings of earth as well as the Gentiles pay Him homage. What is the purpose of His appearance? Several times the liturgy notes how "He stretches forth the right hand of His majesty" for the protection of His people (*Coll.*, *Gosp.*, *Off.*). He performs acts of mercy and benevolence.

Next we see Him in another role. The great King who "came down from the (heavenly) mountain" (*Gosp.*) becomes the Son of man, the divine Physician, who touches and cleanses the leper, who receives the pagan centurion and heals his servant. And now His right hand reaches out to bring health and success even to me.

b) What type of a role does the Church assign to herself? She is "Sion rejoicing" over the King's appearance; she "is built" by the Lord; she is the city toward which both the Gentiles and the kings of earth are hastening. To the Church the Lord "appears in His majesty." The life of the Church is indicated through allusion to baptism, the Eucharist, and love — can you think of any nobler trilogy? *Baptism* is represented in the cleansing of the leper, the reason why the miracle was so dearly loved by the early Church (both the Benedictus and the Magnificat antiphons recall the scene). The spiritual import is identical with that of Easter, the motif which carries through on so many Sundays of the year (see also the *Off.*). The *Eucharist* is indicated in Christ's words, "Many will sit at table with Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob." And the Epistle is devoted to the subject of *love*. A final

point. Sinners (the leper) and Gentiles (the centurion), the liturgy tells us, will occupy the first places in the Church, God's kingdom on earth.

c) Does the liturgy take any note of us individuals? Surely. We are "the daughters of Judah shouting with joy." Our joyous spirit arises from being God's redeemed children: "The right hand of the Lord upholds me. I shall not die, for I have divine life within me." Moreover, we are personified by the leper and the centurion in the Gospel. Their roles are most instructive. Note how humbly the leper approaches: "If You will it, You can make me clean." He does not even ask to be made clean but simply puts his trust in the Lord. This is the type of fervent faith and confidence we should have on coming to the house of God.

Equally edifying is the example given by the centurion, the standard-bearer of the Gentile world. In our name as well as his he received the King who "was entering His city" (*Gosp.*). What kind of spirit did he show? Love toward his servant; humility; faith. "Such faith I have not found in Israel." He also had a just understanding and appreciation of his profession. A soldier from head to foot, he required obedience and also knew how to take orders. Surely the Church had abundant reason for enshrining his memory in the Communion prayer: "Lord, I am not worthy. . . ." Every time we approach the Lord's table it is in company with that centurion.

B. Christ the Healer. In what role did Christ appear on earth? Ever since Epiphany we have had opportunity to consider that question. Christ, we have seen, came as the great Teacher; He is "the way, the truth, and the life." He also appeared as the great Priest showing us how to offer true prayer and true Sacrifice. Thirdly, He came as mankind's Physician and Healer. This role is highlighted today in the Gospel account of the healing of the leper and the Roman officer's servant. From the very beginning of His public life our Lord eagerly sought and healed the sick. Countless the miracles He worked in their behalf. The question is: Why did He do so? Was this His mission in life, to heal the sick, to be a physician? Certainly not. He had a much

higher purpose. *He sought to heal sick souls.* But since the soul is not immediately tangible, He had first to heal the body. Because the healing of the soul could not be seen, Jesus prepared the way by filling the role of physician to the body. The real purpose of all His miracles was to reveal Himself as spiritual Physician.

We call Jesus the "Savior." Through constant use we have become so accustomed to the term that its inherent warmth and beauty are lost on us. The truth remains — *Jesus is our Savior, our Healer.*[1] He heals the wounds and maladies of the soul. While on earth He mingled freely with sinners, and with the sick and the suffering. When He was reproached for associating with sinners, He replied: "It is not the healthy but the sick who need a physician. I have not come to call the just to repentance, but sinners." The Samaritan woman at Jacob's well, the sinful Magdalene, the woman taken in adultery, the thief who hung to His right, these were "hopeless cases" that responded well to His work of spiritual healing.

Nor did Jesus abandon His healing activity after leaving the world. On the contrary, it was then that the spiritual healing symbolized in His miraculous cures was to become fully effective. In His Church Jesus is the Healer of souls. The Church is the great infirmary or hospital, established to bring us back to health. Here Jesus continues His work of healing. Your soul, Christian friend, also needed, and still needs, healing. The surgery of baptism removed from you the mortal wound of original sin; the sacrament of penance heals your acute and chronic ailments; the Eucharist furnishes the medicine to counteract spiritual death and ensure eternal health and well-being. "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof; say but one word and my soul will be healed." There is good reason why the Church would have us frequently repeat this prayer of the noble centurion.

C. Sinners and Heathens. In these two words I see expressed

[1] The author plays on the German word for *Savior*, which is *Heiland* (from *heilen*, to heal, make well), and lends itself much better to his purpose than the English word *Savior*. (*Translator's note*).

the essence of the third Sunday after Epiphany. Sinners and heathens! What, some will say, have these to do with us? Of all people, such should be the very ones that concern us least. Have not sinners forsaken God and become rebels against our divine King? While heathens know nothing of the true God and are far outside Christ's kingdom! How, then, do these two classes of people fit into such a lovable season as the Christmas cycle?

Read the life of Jesus as given in the four Gospels. Quickly you will see how our Savior was attracted precisely to sinners and heathens. While those among the Jews who thought themselves "pious and holy," namely, the Pharisees and Scribes, and even priests of the Law, were the very ones who fiercely resented Him. They were the ones who nailed Him to the Cross. How tragic that a pagan like Pilate sought to save Christ from the hands of the rabid and ruthless Jews, only to be finally compelled, against his will, to hand Him over for crucifixion!

Among sinners and heathens, on the other hand, Jesus found enthusiastic welcome. I could recite a long list of examples. How honored the noble centurion felt that Christ should think of "entering under his roof." How ardently the Canaanite woman, a heathen, cried out to the Lord in order to obtain her daughter's healing! And that other Gentile woman who suffered from hemorrhage, with what great faith she approached the Lord to touch His garment! And that man in Gerasene country who had been afflicted by the devil and was cured, how earnestly he entreated Jesus for permission to accompany Him! And, to mention one last example. The pagan Magi came from the distant East to adore the newborn King of the Jews, whereas King Herod and the Great Council scoffed at the very idea. After Christ's ascension the apostles, especially St. Paul, had the same experience; again and again the Jews would spurn the gospel, while the Gentiles became enthusiastic.

Sinners responded in a similar way. "He was the guest of a sinner. . . . He eats and drinks with sinners," so spoke the Jews in disdain. Jesus accepted the reproach: "The healthy need no

physician, but the sick do." He had come "to seek those who were lost." He hurled a sevenfold woe against the "pious crowd" in Israel, but had only the warmest commiseration with gladdening pardon for the adulteress, for the sinful woman who came to Simon's house, for the Samaritan woman, for the thief to His right on Calvary. "I do not wish to condemn you; sin no more." "This day you will be with Me in paradise." He revealed His attitude toward sinners definitively in the three "lost and found parables," viz., the prodigal son, the lost sheep, and the lost coin (drachma).

Jesus displayed no rancor, nor did He impose humiliating conditions for pardon. When He forgave, all was forgotten. Thus, the father restored to his prodigal son all rights and privileges. The son had merely asked to make atonement by serving as a slave; instead, the father received him again as one of his rightful sons. Indeed, if the son had persisted in his despondent mood and kept on moaning to everybody, "I acted foolishly, I shouldn't be taken back by my father," then, I believe, the father would have asked him to leave.

The lesson for us is clear. Following Christ's example we should show consideration to sinners, fallen-away Catholics, and non-Catholics. We must not be like the Pharisees, arrogant and disdainful toward others. We must treat sinners with kindness and patience, with compassion and forgiveness. The same attitude should govern our dealings with those who cling to other beliefs and teachings. All of them we should approach in the spirit of Christ. The way to win them is not by wrangling and arguing, much less by unfriendly acts or wholesale condemnation. The only effective means is love and compassion. We need not on that account compromise our principles in the least, since loyalty to principles is quite compatible with the tolerance that grows out of Christian love.

Moreover, we should not always be judging men according to the theoretical doctrines of their sect or denomination; in real life they are often very close to us, and love is the bridge that spans the gap. It is not, I repeat, by apologetics and casuistry that

we will convert the world, but, like Christ, through love, understanding, and compassion. We Catholics are too ready to play the judge and pass sentence on others; in this respect we often are no better than the Pharisees. We so easily overlook the many virtues and noble qualities to be found in those not of the faith. We could make this a practical resolution for the week: I will be Christlike in my conduct toward all non-Catholics. Secondly: I will remember the pagans, too, in mission lands.

D. Psalm 96: This Sunday's Theme Psalm. A man's song is the clue to his soul, to the joys and sorrows that fill his heart. The liturgy sings Psalm 96 (see Epiphany Matins) as she muses upon Christ's manifestation to the world. On the Sundays after Epiphany (third to sixth Sunday) the psalm is sung at three points in the Mass (*Intr.*, *Grad.*, and in the older formulary, *Comm.*) as homage to the divine King upon His visit to our city Sion. It is fitting, then, that we acquire a better understanding of its content.

Psalm 96

Prelude (v. 1)

The Lord is king; let the earth rejoice;
let the many isles be glad.

I. *The majesty of the Judge* (vv. 2–6)

Clouds and darkness surround him,
justice and right serve as foundations for his throne.
Fire precedes him
and consumes his enemies round about.
His lightnings illumine the world;
the earth sees it and trembles.
The mountains melt like wax before the Lord,
the whole earth before the face of the Lord.
The heavens herald his justice,
all the nations behold his glory.

II. (a) *Destruction of the idols* (vv. 7–9)

All who worship graven things are put to shame,
who glory in their vain idols;
all gods fall prostrate before him.
Sion hears it and is glad,
the daughters of Judah rejoice
because of your judgments, O Lord.
You, O Lord, are the Most High over all the earth,
and far exalted above all gods.

(b) *Salvation to the just* (vv. 10–12)

Therefore, hate evil, you who love God.
He guards the souls of his just ones;
from the power of evildoers he delivers them.
Light dawns for the just,
and gladness for the upright of heart.
Rejoice in the Lord, you just,
and praise his holy Name.

This psalm is one of a group (92, 94–98) which proclaim the God of the covenant King of all the world, the Conqueror over the Gentiles. Some of these psalms begin with the acclamation: "The Lord is King," *Dominus regnavit.* Psalm 96 describes the inauguration of the messianic kingdom under the popular picture of a thunderstorm, dreadful and annihilating to the wicked, purifying and refreshing to the virtuous. It is cast in two fairly similar stanzas; the first treats the theophany while the second portrays the judgment.

Israel's conception of judgment was quite obscure; in part it was also distorted, reflecting national pride and prejudice. In Christ God's judgment has been and is being realized. The God of the covenant whose coming in judgment is likened to a thunderstorm by the psalmist is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Outwardly He appeared to the world in the mantle of lowliness, but in reality He was the "Stronger One," who en-

tered the arena of this world to vanquish the "Strong One," Satan with all his idols and idol-worshippers. The Jews had expected that when the Messiah came to judge the world, He would destroy the Gentile nations and organize Israel into a world-wide, earthly empire. We know how wrong they were. Christ did indeed come to judge, but in a completely different sense. Messianic judgment is pronounced already by each man within himself: "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe is already judged" (John 3:18).

During these weeks after Epiphany our royal Guest remains with us; and our mood continues joyful. Even the "distant isles" rejoice, viz., the Gentiles, whose firstfruits were the Magi. Our Savior's coming is a preparation for His second epiphany in "great power and majesty" when He will strike terror into the wicked, but bring eternal blessings to the "daughters of Sion." In the Mass He is surrounded by angels, and by holy Communion "He guards the souls of His holy ones and delivers them from the hand of the sinner."

Scripture Readings during the Week Following the Third Sunday after Epiphany

Monday. Today we will modify our usual procedure and bring together into one reading a number of beautiful passages from the Epistle to the Galatians.

"With Christ I am nailed to the Cross; therefore, to speak truly, it is no longer I that live, but Christ lives in me. My present life in the flesh is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and delivered Himself up for me" (2:19f).

"The fullness of time came and God sent His Son. He was born of a woman and was subject to the Law. His mission was to ransom those who were under the Law, that we might receive adoption as sons. Because you are now sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, by whose aid we cry, 'Abba, Father.' Through God, then, you are no longer a slave, you are a son; and if a son, then too an heir" (4:4ff).

"You know how physically weak I was when I preached to you the gospel for the first time, and what a severe trial was imposed on you because of my condition. Yet you did not despise and reject me; on the contrary, you received me as an angel from God, yes, even as Christ Jesus. What, then, has happened to your holy enthusiasm? I can bear you witness that, if possible, you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me" (4:13ff).

"My children, I suffer anew the pains of childbirth for you, until Christ is formed in you. I wish I were now with you, because I am greatly troubled for your sake" (4:19).

"In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is of any value, but only faith that is effective through love" (5:6).

Tuesday (Gal. 5:13—6:18). As was his custom, Paul concluded the epistle with practical admonitions. It was in place here to warn the Jewish Christians against abusing their liberation from Mosaic Law.

"My brethren, you have been called to liberty. Only, do not use liberty as a permission to seek after bodily lusts, but serve one another in love. For the whole Law is fulfilled in the one commandment: 'You must love your neighbor as yourself.' But if you bite and tear one another — watch out or you'll become cannibals!

"I say: walk in the spirit; then you will not indulge the lusts of the flesh. . . . The fruit of the spirit is: love, joy, peace, patience, kindliness, goodness, trust, meekness, modesty, temperance, chastity. The Law does not forbid such things! They who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their flesh together with its passions and desires."

Wednesday (Eph. 1:1–14). The Epistle to the Ephesians is one of the letters St. Paul wrote during his first imprisonment at Rome (61–63 A.D.). It is a fine example of the well-rounded, classical compositions that came from the apostle's pen at the height of his career. The epistle describes the excellence of Christ's redemptive work, the dignity of the Christian, and the grandeur of the Church; then it draws some practical conclusions for the

moral life of Christians. The introduction, a renowned hymn in praise of God's grace, falls easily into three parts. First, it extols the eternal decree of the Father:

"Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Through Christ He has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in heaven. Before the foundation of the world He chose us in Him, so that we should be holy and without blemish in His sight. In His love He predestined us through Jesus Christ to be His children, according to the free determination of His will, in order that we might praise the glory of His grace, which He has bestowed on us in His beloved Son."

The accomplishment of the divine decree of redemption came through Christ:

"In Him we have redemption through His blood; the remission of sins is due to the richness of His grace, which He has given us in abundance together with all wisdom and prudence. He has made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His free determination, which He formed within Himself to be accomplished in the fullness of time, viz., to give Christ the headship in all things, those in heaven and those on earth. In Him we were also provided with the inheritance, we who were predestined according to the plan of Him who works all things according to the determination of His will. We who even before now placed our hope in Christ, should serve unto the praise of His glory."

The Holy Spirit, however, applies the grace of redemption to the individual soul:

"In Him you too, after you had heard the word of truth, the good tidings of your salvation, and believed in it, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. He is the pledge of our inheritance, the guarantee of final full possession, for which we will praise His glory."

Thursday (Eph. 1:15—2:23). Paul describes the greatness of the work of redemption.

"God, who is rich in mercy, has shown us His great love and with Christ has brought us to life again, even though by our

transgressions we were dead — by grace were you saved. In Christ Jesus He raised us up together, and together placed us in the kingdom of heaven, in order to show in the ages to come the overflowing riches of His grace, because of His goodness towards us in Christ Jesus. For, by grace you were saved through faith. It was not your merit; it is God's gift. Nor was it owing to works; no one, therefore, can boast about it. We are His workmanship, fashioned in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared for Him beforehand, that we might walk in them. . . . So, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household. You are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, while Christ is the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord. Upon Him you also are built together into a dwelling place for God in the Spirit."

Friday (Eph. 4:1–5:2). Paul gives admonitions for Christian living.

"As a prisoner in the Lord I exhort you: Walk worthy of the calling you have received. Abound in humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another in love. Strive earnestly to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace. For you are one body and one spirit, even as in your calling you were called to one hope. One Lord, one faith, one baptism! One God and Father of all, who is above all, throughout all, and in all. . . . Then we shall no longer be small children; rather, by love we shall grow in Him who is the head: Christ."

Saturday (Eph. 5:21—6:9). Paul points out various duties pertaining to married life. He draws his conclusions from the doctrine of the Mystical Body.

"Be obedient to one another in the fear of Christ. Let wives obey their husbands as they would the Lord; for the husband is head of the wife as Christ is head of the Church — He is the savior of His body. As the Church is subject to Christ, so ought wives be to their husbands. Husbands, you must love your wives as Christ loved the Church — He delivered Himself up for her to sanctify her. He cleansed her in the baptism of water through

the word (of life) that He might prepare unto Himself a glorious Church, without spot and wrinkle or any such thing; for she was to be holy and unblemished. Husbands, then, should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. No one ever hated his own flesh, everyone nourishes and protects it. This is also how Christ bears Himself toward His Church, because we are the members of His body, flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone. 'For this reason a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, and the two become one flesh.' This is a great *mysterium* — understood, of course, with reference to Christ and His Church. Each of you, therefore, should love his wife as himself; the wife, she should reverence her husband."

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

The King comes as the Conqueror

On the third Sunday after Epiphany Christ showed Himself as the Savior of sinners and Gentiles. On this fourth Sunday He appears in the role of Conqueror, as indicated by His mastery over the storm on the sea related in the Gospel.

1. Divine Office. The doctrine proper to today's Divine Office is in the Gospel pericope and in the first nocturn lessons which introduce St. Paul's letter to the Philippians. In the third nocturn we read St. Jerome's comments upon the Gospel narrative of the storm on the sea of Galilee:

" 'But He was asleep. So they came and woke Him, and said: Lord, save us!' An Old Testament type for the story can be found in the prophet Jonas. While the others were in grave danger of shipwreck, the prophet was sleeping calmly; in fact, he had to be awakened. By the instructions he gave them and by his suffering (which prefigured a future mystery), he saved those who had awakened him. 'Then He arose and commanded

the winds and the sea.' These words teach us that all creatures sense their Creator. For, the object that is rebuked and commanded must be aware of the one commanding. Note, however, that what I am saying is by no means to be taken in the sense of those heretics who believe all things are endowed with a soul. Rather, what I mean is that by reason of the Creator's sovereign majesty even those things which cannot sense man's presence, are nevertheless aware of Him."

In the antiphons at sunrise and sunset we associate ourselves with the apostles and beg Jesus to calm the storm: "When Jesus got into a boat, behold, there arose a great storm on the sea; and His disciples woke Him saying: Lord, save us! we are perishing!" (*Ben. Ant.*). "Lord, save us! we are perishing! Command, O God, and make a great calm!" (*Magn. Ant.*). The liturgy lays singular stress on the disciples' urgent plea; it is one we should make our own.

2. Scripture Reading (Phil. 1:1–18). Like Ephesians the Epistle to the Philippians was written by St. Paul during his first imprisonment at Rome. Of all his letters, none is more intimate or affectionate. He dearly loved the community at Philippi, his first foundation on European soil; and it always remained true and devoted to him. The apostle thanks the community for the love-inspired gift they had sent him in prison; he sought to inform them of his condition and included some practical exhortations for their lives as Christians (1:1–18). In the liturgy only two days are at our disposal for covering this beautiful epistle. (We hope many will take it upon themselves to read it through entirely.)

Paul begins by giving thanks for the zealous faith of the Philippian Christians. Then he explains to them that his imprisonment had not proven detrimental to the gospel; on the contrary, in various ways it had been beneficial. Whatever the result of the legal proceedings against him, he was completely resigned to God's holy will.

"My hope and longing is that I shall in no way be put to shame, but rather that Christ now as always will be freely and

openly glorified in my body, whether in life or in death. For as I see it, living means Christ, and death means enrichment. If life in the flesh is to be my lot, this will simply mean more fruitful labor. Thus, my choice is a hard one, and I am strongly attracted to both sides. My desire is to die and be with Christ; this is by far the best. But to continue in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. And with this conviction I know that I shall stay on and abide among you for your advancement and joy in the faith" (1:20–25).

Paul then addresses himself directly to his community, admonishing them to follow in the footsteps of Christ: "Think in the same way as did Christ Jesus. . . ."

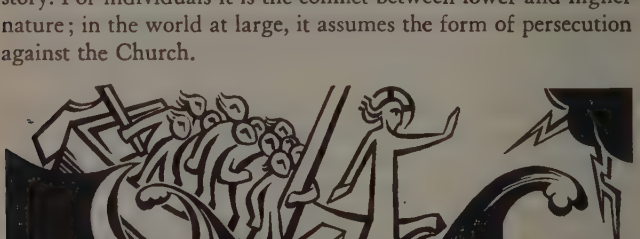
The second nocturn provides an excerpt from St. Gregory the Great's *Book of Morals* (a commentary on the Book of Job, divided into thirty-five "books" or chapters). Obviously referring to a passage in the Epistle to the Philippians, St. Gregory writes as follows:

"Here on earth the elect are chained down by misery and affliction because they still suffer the penalty of being frail and mortal. But when we shall have put off the frame of mortal flesh, we shall also be delivered from the burdensome bonds that now bind us. We indeed long to appear before God; but we are hindered by the shackles of mortal flesh. Rightly, therefore, are we said to be fettered, because contrary to our desire we are not yet free to go to God. Thus it is that Paul, still oppressed with the burden of his perishable body, longs and cries for eternity: 'I desire to be unbound and be with Christ.' He would not have yearned to be unbound had he not regarded himself bound."

3. Holy Mass (Adorate Deum). The antiphonal parts (*Intr., Grad., All., Off., Comm.*) are the same as last Sunday. At the *Introit* we again behold that majestic adoration scene; the angels are worshipping the King of heaven, and we too acclaim Him with great joy. Anticipating the Gospel, the *Collect* associates the storm on the sea with the dangers besetting us in daily life. Often our only recourse is a most fervent "Lord, save us!" Strug-

gle without, love within — of such Christians are made. The *Epistle* again stresses love of neighbor: "Love is the fulfillment of the law." The *Offertory* may be interpreted as a refrain to the Gospel; Christ's strong hand, which calmed the storm, has rescued me from the torrents of hell, and continues to uphold me.

Though not culled from the Gospel of the day, the *Communion* verse is readily accommodated to it. Even as all at Nazareth marveled over the words proceeding from the mouth of God, so we should marvel at the ways by which many a storm in the Church and the soul is quelled. The Eucharist has both a negative and positive effect; it delivers us from the burden of earthly desires and refreshes us with the nourishment of heaven. Thus, in the Prayers of today's Mass the Church applies the Gospel story. For individuals it is the conflict between lower and higher nature; in the world at large, it assumes the form of persecution against the Church.



4. Sunday Meditation. A. The Calming of the Sea. What is the primary message of the Gospel, and what motivated the early Church to commemorate the incident today?

a) Is the calming of the sea another "manifestation" of the Lord? Two Sundays ago the Church employed the miracle at the wedding of Cana as a means of proclaiming "Christ's glory," viz., His dignity and messianic mission. Today's miracle is well suited to the same purpose. Recall the scene. It is night on the Sea of Galilee. Twelve men are rowing a boat. Suddenly a violent

storm crushes down upon them. As experienced boatmen they know the treachery of the sea; but this time they are at a loss over what to do. They awaken their sleeping Lord. He rises and in an unperturbed, majestic tone commands the turbulent elements. And the waves, like a well-trained dog, crouch at His feet, quieted, silent. Such a display of their Master's power those Twelve would never forget. It was indeed another *epiphany*, a "manifestation" of Christ as Lord. Still, is this what the Church intends today, viz., to dramatize the "manifestation" on Lake Gennesareth?

b) Or is it perhaps her intention to use the incident as an illustration of her own struggles, persecutions, and suffering? Peter's boat has been a traditional symbol of the Catholic Church. Like his small boat, the Church has ever been tossed by the world's rough waters. Ever and again in her history it has happened that the Lord, rising as though from sleep, has commanded the fury of the storm and the waves, and there followed great peace and calm.

c) Then, too, we may think of the individual Christian. No follower of Jesus sails through life on placid waters; tempests will arise, from within and from without. He will be buffeted by the blows of changing fortunes, by temptations, by suffering and sorrow, by varying degrees of persecution. Satan never idles. Surely the manifold struggle of the individual soul was not absent from the mind of Mother Church when she chose this Sunday's Gospel. Note the text of the Collect; it may be regarded as a commentary on the Gospel.

One time St. Anthony the Hermit was severely tormented by devils; despite the vehemence of their attack, he did not yield but steadfastly overcame them. Then, seeing a brilliant light overhead, he inquired: "Where were you, Lord?" And a voice replied: "I was present all the time, Anthony; but I waited in order to see your heroic struggle. Because you remained steadfast, I will always be your helper." The incident brings consolation to us as well. Let us show a persevering heroism, and at the critical time Christ will appear to silence the boisterous sea.

d) Perhaps the Church also intended to introduce the Passion motif. The underlying theme of the Christmas cycle is: Christ lays the foundation of the kingdom of Light on earth. But in these concluding weeks the Church is already preparing us for the Easter cycle, when Light and Darkness will meet in mortal combat. Of this conflict there are indications at various points already in the Christmas season. Today, for instance, in the dark and hostile sea. Before long we will see our Lord tossed by the surging waves of Jewish hostility, then completely engulfed. But He will rise again, triumphant!

e) Our final observation, however, may best convey the intention of today's liturgy. The Gospel story represents Christ's Easter combat and triumph. For every Sunday is Easter, is resurrection. Every Sunday we celebrate Christ's death and resurrection in ourselves. Throughout the week we may be tossed by storms and billowing seas, but at the Sunday Mass Christ again steps into our small boat, silences the storm, and continues within us to perfect His resurrection victory. Every Sunday we advance another step toward the full and perfect Easter triumph. Every Sunday is another link in that great chain which stretches from baptism to the last struggle and final glory.

B. Darkness and Light. In this phrase I would summarize the week's liturgical message. In fact, the phrase characterizes Christian life as such; outside there is darkness, inside there is light. Externally Christian life is not unlike the night voyage across the Sea of Gennesareth, a voyage imperiled by lightning, wind and rain. But inwardly it resembles the peaceful candlelight procession on the feast of Candlemas. Thus do these two liturgies, which frequently occur within the same week, stand in contrast, yet complement, one another.

The Christian life, we have said, resembles a voyage through turbulent waters. Often we may feel that the good God treats us, His children, too severely. There is no denying that God does not conduct Himself like those foolish mothers who, through misguided love, pamper and spoil their children. God's dealing with us is in conformity with a principle oft-repeated in the

Books of Wisdom: *He that loves his child spares not the rod.* God's conduct, then, is to our benefit.

Look back over the centuries. How gloriously the Church shines forth in those early centuries of persecution! Christians were then held in contempt; they were molested and hunted like beasts; but they were more heroic, more holy. In the Middle Ages the Church's outward circumstances were just the reverse; she enjoyed high prestige, great external splendor, was liberally endowed by emperor after emperor. But inwardly there was decline; her inner light and luster waned. Yes, it is good for us when social and political conditions are unfavorable.

Of course, to profit from such circumstances we need what Jesus demanded of His disciples, strong faith and holy confidence. "Why have you so little faith?" Great suffering, great affliction, great need — these things can work both ways; they may be a healing medicine or a deadening drug. The sufferings and privations that abound in modern society have brought many to God. At the same time the poverty and destitution in underprivileged areas act like an opiate on countless souls. Therefore, pray, my brothers, pray for those who are sorely tried. Pray that their needs and privations may occasion grace and healing. Remember especially those "fellow members" of our Body in Christ who are engulfed in the very real tempest of discrimination and suppression, those Christians in the Iron Curtain countries.

Picture to yourself a child of God exiled to the concentration camps of Siberia or the Caucasus. Because of the faith he has been condemned to slave labor. Day after day, without Sunday rest or Sunday Mass and Communion, he is subjected to interminable hours of back-breaking work. A starvation diet must suffice, with scarcely more than rags for clothing. He is the target of blows from the butt end of a soldier's gun, making his life a prolonged death agony. How often such oppressed Christians must cry out: "Lord, save us, we are perishing!" For these oppressed souls, who like St. Paul, are poor yet rich, we must pray; may God help them remain heroically steadfast, and become conquerors. Their suffering enriches the whole Church. They are

filling up and completing what is lacking in the Body of Christ. Evil, however, is not limited to Russia and China; in your own neighborhood you can find "stormy seas." It may take the form of social discrimination, job preferments, political exile, or some other form of misery heavy enough to break a man's spirit. Whatever it be, the Christian will be sympathetic and generous with his assistance.

A few final words on the second scene in this week's drama. I see a candle procession; for it is dark outside. The children of the world are asleep; but God's children are making their way to church, each with a lighted candle. The scene symbolizes a Christian's inner life. Every Christian is a Light-bearer, a Christ-bearer. Though darkness and storm may prevail outside, since the moment of baptism he carries and fosters in his soul the burning candle of grace, Christ Himself. Satan would have that light extinguished; therefore he puffs against it with diabolical might. His puffs are the storms of life. But no matter how blusterous the gale, the child of God keeps his light burning as he carries it farther and farther on the road of life. At the house of God he pauses for inspiration and help; the Gospel and Communion satisfy his needs. Again fully equipped he continues on to the heavenly fatherland.

Scripture Readings in the Week Following the Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Monday (Phil. 3:1—4:23). How deeply the gospel penetrated St. Paul's life may be seen from the following passages.

"What once I considered as gain, I have come to consider as loss for the sake of Christ. In fact, I continually regard everything as loss in the light of the precious knowledge of my Lord Christ Jesus for whom I have abandoned all things. And I equate them with rubbish, in order to gain Christ and be found in Him — not with a justification derived from the law, but with that from faith in Christ Jesus, with justification from God in virtue of faith" (3:7ff).

"I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I may be. I know how to live in poverty and how to live in abundance. I am intimately acquainted with each and every condition, with being filled and being hungry, with being rich and being in want. I can do all things in Him who strengthens me" (4:11–13).

Take your Bible and read the whole epistle; you will be glad you did.

Tuesday (Col. 1:1–29). The Epistle to the Colossians was also written during Paul's first imprisonment at Rome (61–63 A.D.). The letter is especially noteworthy for its magnificent passages on Christ's divine nature, as, for instance, the following:

"Joyfully you should give thanks to the Father for making you worthy to share the inheritance of His saints in light. He has wrested us from domination by darkness and has transferred us into the kingdom of His beloved Son. In Him we have redemption, effecting the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of God invisible, creation's firstborn. For in Him was created everything in heaven and on earth, both what is seen and what is unseen, be they Thrones or Dominations, Principalities or Powers; all was created through Him and for Him. He existed before all things, and in Him all things have stability.

"He is the head of the Body, the Church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, that in all things He may have primacy. Because by His blood shed on the Cross He established peace, it pleased God to make all fullness dwell in Him and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, all things on earth and all things in heaven. And you yourselves — you who formerly were estranged from God and His enemies because of your evil deeds — now He has reconciled you through the death of His human body in order to present you holy, faultless, and irreproachable before Him."

Wednesday (Col. 3:1—4:18). Today another excellent passage from the Epistle to the Colossians, one which sketches the Christian moral ideal.

"If you have risen with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at God's right hand. Relish the things

above, not those of earth. Truly, you have died; and your present life is concealed with Christ in God. But when Christ, our life, appears, you too will appear with Him in glory. Therefore, kill off what is earthy in your members: lust, evil desire, and covetousness, for such is idol-worship. On account of such things God's wrath will come. At one time you too were addicted to these things, and they meant life to you. But now you must rid yourselves of them: anger, animosity, malice, blasphemy; and banish foul talk from your lips. Do not lie to one another. Discard the old man with his works, and put on the new man fashioned after the image of his Creator, to gain true knowledge. Here there is no question of being Gentile or Jew, circumcized or uncircumcized, Barbarian, Scythian, slave or freeman; for Christ is all in all. As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with tender mercy, with kindness, humility, meekness, patience. Bear with one another and forgive if one has a complaint against another."

Thursday (1 Thess. 1:1—2:6). The First Epistle to the Thessalonians is the oldest of the Pauline letters. The apostle wrote it during his second missionary journey, soon after his well-known address to the Athenians. Like the Epistle to the Philippians, it is written in an intimate and tender tone. Paul recounts with joy his missionary work among the Thessalonians and exhorts them to perseverance. Christ's Second Coming, which the faithful believed imminent, is discussed and clarified. For one who has never read St. Paul, it would be advisable to begin with First Thessalonians; it is the easiest to understand and is very revealing of the apostle's loving heart.

Friday (1 Thess. 4:1–14). Like a kindly father, Paul exhorts his beloved community:

"My brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus to conduct yourselves in a manner that is just and pleasing to God, even as you have learned from us. Indeed, your conduct conforms to what we taught you; but do continue to make progress. You know what precepts we gave you in the Name of the Lord Jesus. It is the will of God that you be holy, that you abstain

from immorality. . . . No one may make encroachments upon, or defraud his brother in this matter because the Lord punishes all such things; we have told you this before and proved it. God has not called us to impurity but to holiness."

Saturday (2 Thess. 1:1—2:4). The Second Epistle to the Thessalonians was directed against the error of those who thought Christ's Second Coming would soon occur; it also censures the disorderly conduct of some Christians.

"Concerning the return of our Lord Jesus Christ and our reunion with Him, may we ask you not to be suddenly shaken from your right understanding of the matter and driven to fear, whether by a spirit or by some alleged utterance or letter of ours, as though the day of the Lord were near at hand. Do not allow yourselves to be misled in any way by anyone. The apostasy must take place first, then that godless man must be revealed, the son of perdition, the adversary who exalts himself above all whatever is called God or holy, who will even sit in God's temple and call himself divine."

FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

The King comes as the wise Judge

The epiphany of Christ Jesus to the world should include a manifestation of His power and activity. On these Sundays after Epiphany He therefore appears as the divine Healer or Physician and cures the leper (third Sunday), indicating that sinners and Gentiles are welcome in His kingdom. Next He appears as the Conqueror over hell's raging torrent (fourth Sunday); for His Easter victory is constantly being repeated in the Church and in individual souls. Today (fifth Sunday) He manifests Himself as the wise and patient Judge, who permits both the good and bad seed to grow and ripen. He does not choose to intervene, for He is patiently reserving His final and finest "epiphany" for the

end of time when all will be called to His throne for judgment. That occasion will mark the perfect fulfillment of our Mass text's judgment psalm (96); during these weeks the psalm is sung three times each Sunday, viz., at the Introit, Alleluia, and Communion. Another observation. Christmas and Epiphany mark the founding of God's kingdom; the Sundays after Epiphany show the kingdom in the process of its growth. While on this point it is important to understand properly the role of evil, for at times it may seem as though Satan were stronger than Christ.

1. **Divine Office.** Today, as last Sunday, two distinctive doctrinal areas can be noted in the Hours of Office; and again they are centered in the Gospel (Parable of the Good Seed and the Cockle) and in the Scripture Lessons. The antiphons at dawn and dusk re-echo the parable: "Lord, did You not sow good seed in Your field? How then does it have weeds? He said to them: An enemy has done this" (*Ben. Ant.*). "Gather up first the weeds, and bind them in bundles to burn; but the wheat gather into My barns, says the Lord" (*Magn. Ant.*). What meets our spiritual eye in the morning is the view of a field sown with good seed; shouldn't this make us wonder about the presence of evil in the Church? The evening antiphon tells of the separation of good and evil on the Last Day, when each will receive his due reward. Deftly the morning antiphon refers to the beginning of God's kingdom on earth, while the evening antiphon points forward to its end.

2. **Scripture Reading.** This week we read the four Pauline epistles addressed to individual persons, two to Timothy, one to Titus (the apostle's two favorite disciples), and a private letter to Philemon. The epistles to Timothy and Titus are almost wholly devoted to the duties of a good spiritual shepherd; they are, therefore, commonly called the "pastoral letters." In them priests will find a wealth of practical instruction for the direction of souls. But they are not meant for priests only; any Christian lay apostle will derive much doctrine and edification from them. These letters, moreover, afford us a glimpse into the noble, human

heart of the apostle, a heart that beat with tender love for these, his most intimate disciples.

In the Breviary parts of the First Epistle to Timothy are read today (1:1–16) and tomorrow; we hope you will continue it to the end. The letter falls easily into six main parts:

1. warning against false teachers (1:3–20)
2. public worship (2:1–15)
3. ecclesiastical offices (3:1–16)
4. piety and asceticism (4:1–16)
5. priestly duties toward the flock (5:1—6:2)
6. final exhortation (6:3–21)

In passing, we may note that St. Augustine opens the second nocturn sermon with an adaptation of a well-known passage from First Timothy: "This statement is trustworthy and deserves fullest acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

3. Holy Mass (Adorate Deum). The psalm chants, familiar from the third and fourth Sundays, are exceptionally well suited to the time after Epiphany. The central idea continues to be: *the King has built up Sion and is seen in His glory.* The *Collect* identifies the Christian community as God's family. As Father of this family, God never ceases to guard, protect and defend it while the family in turn does not rely upon its own strength and resources, but rather upon divine grace. In the Mass this prayer finds truest fulfillment. Our preparation is our trust and confidence; the fruit of the Sacrifice is God's protection and help.

The Readings (Epistle and Gospel) sketch the Church from two contrasting approaches; one is light and cheery, the other dark and sobering; one depicts the ideal, the other remains closer to life and reality. In the *Epistle* Paul describes the ideal — a community of saints adorned with every Christian virtue. In this community love is queen; in her train follows the peace of Christ. The apostle is giving us a glimpse of the liturgical worship and the private lives of the early Christians. With them the word of God "dwelt abundantly." We hear them singing psalms

and spiritual canticles; and, privately, their every act is performed "in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ."

The *Gospel,* by way of contrast, shows another Christian community, one marred by human weaknesses and sins, grave scandals, lukewarmness, indifference, petty jealousies. Which makes our hearts heavy. But Jesus' words help us understand the enigma of evil in the Church. From the two readings it is easy to deduce a program for the week. Personally, and in my relations with others, I will try to reproduce the ideal; if evil crosses my path, I will not be scandalized; I will seek to imitate God's patience toward it.

The Gospel, moreover, provides revealing insights into the mysterious and often inexplicable character of God's kingdom as it continues to grow through the centuries. There is, for instance, the mystery of the abiding presence of evil in the Church. Evil is the devil's sowing. Evil is permitted; indeed, in God's providential plan it must thrive and ripen. On earth both good and evil enjoy freedom of action, and both serve a purpose. Evil is designed to chasten the good, to prove their strength and steadfastness; it is God's rod of correction upon the virtuous. Strictly speaking, it can cause no harm to God's kingdom. This reassurance should be a consolation, especially in days like the present, when we meet so much evil in the world.

Now let us apply the lesson of the Gospel to ourselves. Today at Mass the divine Sower sows the good seed (wheat) of the Eucharist in my soul, expecting it to grow during the week. Of course, as the week passes, the devil, too, will sow his weeds; but by penance and mortification we can nullify their influence. May this day's "Sacrifice of propitiation" steady our "vacillating hearts" (*Secr.*). The Eucharist is the "pledge" of "salvation's fulfillment" (*Postc.*); in the light of the Gospel parable this means that the divine Reaper is already gathering our ripened sheaves into His heavenly barns.

4. Sunday Meditations. A. The Seaside Sermon. For a better understanding of the parables on the fifth and sixth Sundays after Epiphany, it would help to be familiar with the historical

context in which they appear. Hence, a few remarks are in order concerning our Lord's activity previous to the sermon on the shores of Lake Gennesareth.

When Jesus began His public ministry He directed His efforts toward the Jewish people at large. He wanted all of them to enter God's kingdom (the Church), irregardless of their status in life. So He preached everywhere, in Judea, in Samaria, in Galilee. He addressed Himself not only to the well-bred, to the doctors of the Law and the Pharisees, but likewise to the common people, the plain folk and the illiterate. In short, He wished to be the Redeemer of all. Yet the longer He preached and the more miracles He worked, the more did the Jewish leaders strive to turn the people away from and against Him. Wherever His preaching or His miracles had won popular admiration and approval, the Pharisees, too, appeared, weakening and undermining the effect of His work.

Presently He was staying at Peter's house in Capharnaum, where He cured a man possessed by a devil. The people, of course, were amazed; but the Pharisees quickly retorted that Jesus Himself was possessed and that He cast out devils by invoking the prince of devils. It was a low blow. He who had come to break the devil's power and to redeem mankind from bondage to Satan, He was now accused of being in league with His archenemy. The blasphemous accusation could not go unanswered. Before Jesus finished His apology, He had made it plain to the Pharisees that not He but they themselves were possessed by a

sevenfold devil; and because they would not accept the Messiah, they who had been a "chosen people" would be rejected.

The incident was a turning point in our Lord's ministry. From then on He became more reserved and began to concentrate His efforts on the preparation and formation of His disciples. Shortly before He had chosen twelve among His followers, whom He called apostles. These were destined to preach His gospel to the world. Therefore He would use every means to confirm their belief in His mission of salvation and to prepare them for the great missionary work that lay ahead. His activity was now dedicated primarily to the task of forming His apostles. And though He still went among the people, His preaching to them took a new turn. Evidence of His altered approach soon appears in the sermon to the crowd preached from Peter's boat on the Sea of Galilee. It was His so-called "Seaside Sermon." He spoke only in parables, without explaining them to His listeners. But later when alone with His apostles, He interpreted and applied them.

What was the message of that sermon? Jesus Himself pointed out its principal theme, namely, the mysteries of the kingdom of God (or, the kingdom of heaven — the terms are interchangeable). God's kingdom, or the kingdom of heaven, is the Church on earth. "Mystery" here does not mean a doctrinal statement, such as a dogma of faith. Christ is using the term to designate the mysterious nature and growth of the Church, a development that goes counter to human expectation. To know the mystery of the kingdom, then, is primarily to realize that outwardly the kingdom makes no pretensions or display as it adheres to the ordinary course of events, without miracles or other astounding phenomena. All its power and majesty lie within, invisible to earthly eyes.

Taking the Seaside Sermon as a whole, its content may be divided into five parts:

1. the founding of God's kingdom (parable of the sower)
2. the tragedy of evil (parable of the good seed and the cockle)

3. growth and development of the kingdom:
   a) parable of the growing seed
   b) parable of the mustard seed
   c) parable of the leaven
4. incomparable value of God's kingdom (parables of the treasure and the pearl)
5. conclusion: final phase of the kingdom (parable of the fish-filled net)

First part. The parable of the sower describes the founding of God's kingdom (especially with reference to individual souls). *The moral.* Whether and how far God's kingdom will be realized in me depends upon my cooperation. I am the soil. God is continually sowing His grace in my heart. His kingdom should yield an abundance of full-grown, ripened fruit, such as may be expected from a divine planting. If it fails to do so, the fault is mine, completely. I hindered or stifled its growth. The soil was deficient. Some of it may have been worn hard by constant treading (spirit of indifference). Or my heart was stony ground (too superficial). Perhaps the whole field was overgrown with the thorns of earthly hankerings and pleasures, choking God's seed. Briefly, the great lesson of the parable is: *God's kingdom is glorious indeed, but first it must grow in me and I must cooperate with grace.*

Second part. The parable of the weeds throws light on the tragedy of evil in the Church. Evil is the devil's planting. God allows it to thrive and reach full maturity, unhindered. In this life both the good and the bad are granted complete freedom of operation. Yes, evil has its place in the divine plan. As noted earlier, it serves to chasten the good and test their steadfastness. It is God's rod of correction, and should contribute to the growth of virtue in the good. It cannot cause the kingdom of heaven any real harm. It will not, however, go unpunished; no, the wages of evil is eternal ruin and punishment. Be patient, therefore, with evildoers. Do not begrudge them their short-lived, earthly happiness. Above all, do not hate them, rather they are to be pitied.

Thus does this parable contribute to a solution to that greatest enigma, the presence of evil in God's kingdom.

Third part. The growth and impact of God's kingdom is the burden of three brief parables. The first, that of the spontaneously growing seed, is found in St. Mark 5:26ff. This short, little-known parable conveys some goodly thoughts on God's kingdom. Both its founding and its termination at the end of time are effected by Christ in person. Meanwhile, however, He does not intervene personally but leaves things to their normal development. It is as though Jesus slept, like the man in the parable, and the seed He had sown continued to grow of itself. Nevertheless, the kingdom's inner vitality is derived from Him. If the parable of the sower emphasized the need of man's cooperation with grace, the parable of the spontaneously growing seed stresses the intrinsic power and efficacy of grace.

The inherent vitality of the Church finds further expression in the parables of the grain of mustard seed and the leaven. Of these the first reveals the outward expansion of God's kingdom, the second its inner dynamism. Christianity grows from a small beginning to unexpected greatness (first parable); it leavens or transforms the whole man (second parable). Christ's Church does not spread by means of tangible power and natural resources, but quietly and unassumingly through the inherent, invisible dynamics of grace, which leave no human fiber untouched. Putting these three parables together, we find they have a common message; in outward appearance God's kingdom is small, unpretentious; but its inner potentiality is vast and mighty.

Fourth part. The parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price teach us how much to prize and esteem God's kingdom. There are two main lessons, one doctrinal, the other practical. 1. (Doctrinal lesson). The kingdom of God exceeds in worth and value anything material or of this world — wealth, honor, pleasures. 2. (Practical lesson). I must therefore be prepared to forego them all, if God so wills. The kingdom of God must be *my greatest* treasure.

Fifth part. The parable of the fish-filled net makes a fitting con-

clusion to the whole discourse because it pictures the termination of God's kingdom on earth on Judgment Day. Only then will the good be definitively separated from the evil.

To sum up. The Seaside Sermon contains very valuable instruction. From it we too may obtain a better understanding of the "mysteries" of the kingdom of heaven.

B. The Parable of the Weeds. Visualize a seasoned, well-equipped farmer. To help him with the care and cultivation of his fields he employs several men. As spring approaches he prepares his seed, wheat in particular. He cleans it thoroughly, sifts out all impurities. It is good seed. At the proper time he and his helpers sow this good seed in the fields. When the seeding is over, he is confident all is well and expects a clean growth. But the farmer has an enemy in the neighborhood who is resolved to harm him. Will human nature ever change!

One night, then, his enemy comes and sows other seed, weed seed, into his already planted acres. A dastardly act! What he sowed was darnel, a weed that still abounds on Palestinian farms. In its early stages the weed is hardly distinguishable from the wheat plant proper. Only when the stalk is in full ear can the difference be easily seen. Nor can the weed be removed without damage to the grain, since the roots of one are entwined with those of the other. One must wait until the harvest and then glean out the weeds, bundle and burn them.

The explanation of the parable becomes easier if we center our attention upon three points: (a) the good seed and the weeds in the field; (b) the attitude of the sower toward the growth of both; (c) harvest time.

a) Who is the sower of the good seed? He is Jesus Christ, who established God's kingdom on earth. The field is the world. Our Savior came to establish a kingdom and wanted everybody a member. The good seed are the actual children of God, that is, the true Christians. The weeds are the sinners, the evildoers, who are not true members. The enemy that sows the weeds is the devil. He is always at work trying to plant evil (sin) in the hearts of men, and thus turn them into children of hell. By the

weeds our Lord was not referring to pagans or to those outside His Church. In this parable He simply was not thinking of them. He had in mind those who are Christians in appearance or in name, but in reality are members of Satan's realm. This is the first lesson to be learned from the parable, namely, in Christ's Church the good and the bad are intermingled, like wheat and weeds in a field. It is a bitter truth, bitterly illustrated already by Judas Iscariot, and not long thereafter in the infant Church by Ananias and Sapphira. That truth Jesus sought to impress upon the minds of the apostles lest when they saw its concrete manifestations they should fall victim to error.

b) The second point concerns the farmer's attitude toward the weeds. In accord with Palestinian agricultural methods he does not permit them to be removed during the time of growth. His procedure is not without spiritual significance. It indicates that God allows freedom of action to the good and bad alike. The span of life allotted to each man is at his disposal; he can make of it what he wills. In a very real sense he enjoys complete freedom to decide his own course and conduct. Nor does God always act at once against sinners. He does not strike out instantly when persecutors arise. Both good and evil are permitted to grow and spread in the world. The final separation and judgment will not come until the end of one's life, or, for mankind collectively, until the Last Day. Here, then, we have the parable's second great lesson. The ultimate adjustment of good and evil does not take place on earth; only in the hereafter will full justice be meted out.

c) The last part of the parable looks forward to harvest time. In His explanation Jesus said: "The harvest is the end of the world. The reapers are the angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burnt with fire, so will it be at the end of time. The Son of Man (Christ) will send forth His angels, and they will cull out of His kingdom all tempters and evildoers and throw them into the fiery furnace; there they will cry out and gnash their teeth. The just, however, will shine forth like the sun, in their Father's kingdom."

Whatever
you may do in word or in work;
do it in the Name
of the Lord Jesus Christ and be
grateful to God the Father
through Him ✚

Here, from the lips of the Savior Himself, we have a brief, graphic description of hell and heaven. Hell He likens to a burning furnace. The torments of the damned are indicated by the wailing and the gnashing of teeth, a figure that suggests not only the terrible sufferings of hell, but also its frustrated fury and its despair. In sharp and soothing contrast follows our Lord's description of the reward of the just. The chosen sheaves are carefully gathered by the angels into the heavenly barns. There the upright "shine resplendently like the sun." Clothed in eternal light, they enter the kingdom of heaven amid greatest splendor and glory.

How Christ's word-picture of the Last Day moves our hearts! Below are the burning bundles, the damned. Their fire, an intense, murky glow, overspreads the nether regions. Cries of hopeless anguish resound from end to end. Above are the glorified elect, shining like the refulgent evening sun as they file through the gate into the kingdom of everlasting peace.

Before leaving this parable I would like to underscore its special lessons for us, since our Lord meant it for us as well as for His disciples.

In the first place, the parable gives us a clue to the enigma of evil in the world. Over this problem many men have racked their brains. How can God permit evil? During both world wars how often did you hear: If God exists how could He allow such wrongs and atrocities! And afterwards the complaint was: Evil has triumphed, the cause of right and justice has been scuttled. Where, then, is your God?

Now the thoughts of God are not the thoughts of man, nor are His ways man's ways. If on earth He permits weeds to grow side by side with the wheat, He does not on that account surrender His control or lordship over the world. God wishes to rule over free human subjects. For this reason He permits evil wide scope for growth and expansion. The weeds are allowed to spread throughout the field. It is not part of God's design to intervene beforehand in the lives of men; that would be unworthy of His supreme majesty. It would also imply that good

cannot cope with evil; while, actually, true goodness does possess sufficient inherent power to withstand evil. God can wait. The sight of so many wicked men does not disturb His divine tranquillity or His divine sureness of virtue's ultimate triumph.

The fainthearted, of course, will say: Doesn't evil bring harm to many? Yes, it does. Nevertheless, every one is free to choose between right and wrong; and every one receives adequate grace. Evil can only cleanse and chasten and confirm the good; it cannot destroy it. St. Ambrose says: "Take away the persecutors, and where are the martyrs? Take away the combat, and where is the crown of victory?" Wheat will remain wheat despite the weeds. Those who become weeds do so through their own free choice. In the last analysis, evil and the devil himself only serve God and help to realize His eternal plan for the universe. Do not be afraid. The divine Householder watches over His sowing with faithful care. There will be no forceful uprooting of His children.

Consider also how patient and sparing is God's treatment of the wicked. God is longsuffering. And while nature cannot transform weeds into wheat, a persecutor of Christians like Saul can become a Paul, no finer grain the Church has ever grown. In this life there is always the possibility of a bad man's conversion, his entrance into the ranks of the upright. Doubtless, there are times when we find God's patience hard to bear. We find it difficult to understand why He waits so long. Yes, the mills of God grind slowly, as they grind exceedingly fine.

Another practical lesson. We human beings are so impatient. If we had our way, we would call down thunder and lightning to consume the wicked. Impatience is one of our greatest faults. We short-lived humans feel as though we had to help God in punishing the wicked. Such an attitude betrays a lack of trust. This parable teaches us to have patience, patience with evildoers, with the weaknesses of men, and, let us not forget, with ourselves. Our feeling toward sinners must not be scorn or hate, but kindly compassion.

Our study of the parable of the weeds was intended, in part,

to provide Scriptural background for the Sunday Gospel. We trust we have succeeded in making it intelligible. It remains now to add a word about its liturgical application. This Gospel may occur during the Epiphany season or in November, depending upon the date of Septuagesima Sunday. The liturgical import of the parable is not wholly the same in both instances. In the Epiphany season attention centers more on the middle part of the parable. Here we see Christ as the wise and patient Judge, who permits both the good and bad seed to grow and ripen, who does not interpose His might and power in the present life.

In the fall of the year, when we readily think of the end of life and the world, the liturgy changes the focus to our Lord's sketch of hell and heaven. The Church lifts the veil on the hereafter; we get a glimmer of the reeking, fuming abyss of hell, and also a glimpse of the blessed in heaven. It is likewise toward the end of the year that the mystery of evil looms ever larger in the liturgy; and the Church tries to help us understand its import. For, the end of the Church year mirrors those final days preceding the end of the world, when evil will make a last, fearsome show of strength. Our parable was designed to put those days in proper perspective, as well as to comfort the elect. Finally, we should also be conscious how Christ in today's Mass seeks to sow seed, the divine wheat seed, in our hearts. His planting should sprout and produce good Christians.

C. Sin enters strongly into today's liturgical theme. It is an opportune occasion, then, to ask: What is the role of sin in God's kingdom? And how do the liturgical texts treat sin? If we page through the Missal and examine the readings (Epistles and Gospels) of the year, we find sin mentioned only occasionally. Even in the Lenten Masses the Church speaks rarely of it. Apart from the season of Lent, there are perhaps only three Sundays on which the liturgy introduces the topic. These would be the present Sunday, the fourth Sunday after Pentecost (telling of God's love and His search for sinners), and the ninth Sunday (which treats of hell). Thus, one of the first things we discover about the liturgy's attitude toward sin is the very rare and, one

might say, the very reluctant mention of it. The liturgy is more disposed to take a positive course, to give the gospel, viz., the glad tidings of salvation; accordingly there is the preference to speak of what is good, to linger over the great spiritual treasures and riches of revelation.

In this, the liturgy is a worthy pupil of Christ, for He too spoke seldom of sin. Not that He treated sin lightly — did He not die for it? But He made no great fuss about individual sins. The moment Jesus saw a man or woman no longer clinging to evil, then too it was a thing of the past for Him. "Neither do I condemn you; sin no more." This is all He said to the adulteress. Many, indeed, are the examples of His mildness toward sinners; witness the Samaritan woman, the thief who hung to His right, Mary Magdalene. His mercy and mildness were never more vividly revealed than in the parable of the prodigal son.

We must follow our Lord's example. We must see the good in men, overlooking their faults and weaknesses. Above all, we must not constantly threaten them with punishment and hell. "They know not what they do." Most of the time they really do not know. Besides, what good results from wailing over the wickedness and sinfulness of the world today? Or what benefit is it to fulminate excommunications against opponents? Such conduct only widens the breach. Try seeing the good in sinners.

On this subject we again find a revealing difference between liturgical (objective) piety and modern (subjective) piety. In subjective piety the point of reference is man. It is primarily concerned with man's activity; hence it busies itself with sin. One might even say that its efforts are primarily directed toward avoiding sin. Devotees of this piety resemble people who spend the day whisking dust particles from their clothes and never find time for constructive action. "Above all, no sin!" This is their fondest motto. Obsessed by the consciousness of sin, such persons miss much of the real joy of being a Christian. Their piety consists mostly in examining their consciences over and over, in making particular examens, writing down their faults, gaining indulgences, preparing for confessions, making retreats,

and recollecting themselves. The sad consequence is that they never find time to practice the virtues of Christ, radiating His goodness in acts not basically self-centered.

Liturgical piety takes a different course. It starts with God, not with man. It knows that we are weak and fault-ridden creatures; but it remembers that God nevertheless chose and called us, giving us His grace. Our essential task is to open our hearts wide to the influx of divine life. Like all life, this life should grow; so it must be nourished. And where there is life, there is joy, and movement, and health and well-being; and there is constructive work and activity. Liturgical piety is concerned with "the things that are above."

Still, it does not take sin lightly. For sin is sickness; it is a threat to God's stay within us. To ignore sickness would be to invite death; therefore one must seek remedies. But God certainly does not want us to resemble hypochondriacs, never able to get our mind away from real or imaginary ailments. Small wonder that the disposition of such people becomes sour and pessimistic. Life should be enjoyed; life in God, I mean. Nourish that life with the Bread of Heaven; let it blossom and bear fruit in an array of virtuous acts. Such, briefly, is the objective of liturgical piety.

Scripture Readings in the Week Following the Fifth Sunday after Epiphany

Monday (1 Tim. 3:1—4:1). In the second part of the epistle Paul lists practical admonitions relating to particular states of life, viz., to men and women (2:8–15); to priests and deacons (ch. 3); to deaconesses and widows (ch. 5); to masters and slaves (ch. 6).

"I write these things to you, hoping to come to you very soon. But if my arrival should be delayed, you will know how one is to conduct himself in the house of God. For the Church of the living God is the pillar and foundation of truth. Great indeed is the mystery of love:

He became visible in the flesh,
was vindicated by the Spirit,
was seen by the angels,
proclaimed to the nations,
believed in throughout the world,
and taken up into glory."

Tuesday (2 Tim. 1:1—2:26). Paul's Second Epistle to Timothy was, no doubt, his last piece of correspondence. About the year 66 he arrived in Rome, was soon imprisoned. His second Roman confinement was far more harsh than his first. In this epistle, written in prison and revealing his presentiments of death, Paul summons his beloved disciple Timothy, expressing the fervent hope he would arrive in Rome before winter. In the year 67 the apostle was put to death, a martyr.

"I give thanks to God, whom, like my forefathers, I serve with a clear conscience. I thank Him when by day and night I remember you unceasingly in my prayer. I recall your tears and I long to see you again that I may be filled with joy. For, in my memory I see your sincere faith, which first dwelled in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and which, I am sure, dwells in you also."

Wednesday (2 Tim. 3:1—4:8). Paul foresees his martyrdom as imminent.

"I am already being prepared for immolation; the time of my dissolution is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Now there awaits me victory's crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will give me on that day; and not to me only, but to all who greet His appearance."

Thursday (Titus 1:1–15). The Epistle to Titus is the third of the so-called "pastoral letters." About Titus more is given on February 6. St. Paul wrote this brief epistle around the year 65, between his first and second imprisonments. As you read its three brief chapters, mark the apostle's last thoughts on grace and redemption.

Friday (Titus 2:15—3:11). Our thoughts go back to Christmas night as we read:

"The goodness and loving-kindness of God our Savior has appeared, bringing us salvation not by reason of good works which we performed in righteousness but according to His mercy, through the bath of regeneration, the renewal by the Holy Spirit. Through our Savior Jesus Christ, He has poured out the Holy Spirit profusely upon us that we might be justified by His grace and become heirs of the eternal life we hope for. This word is true; and I beseech you to be firm in upholding these points in order that they who have come to believe in God will be zealous in performing good works. Such is good and useful to men."

Saturday (Philemon). The shortest of St. Paul's epistles, that to Philemon, is read today. It was a private letter, pleading the cause of a runaway slave to his master. The epistle is an outstanding document of Christian tact and charity, a model of true priestly zeal. Among other things it shows how St. Paul's preoccupation with world-wide missionary labors did not cause him to overlook the plight of an individual soul. The substance of the letter is as follows. A slave named Onesimus had fled his master Philemon, a respected Christian manufacturer of Colossae. The slave sought refuge at Rome. There, Paul, who was then suffering his first Roman imprisonment, converted and sent him back to his master. The letter would obviate difficulties.

The incident touches a basic social question that confronted primitive Christianity, the problem of slavery. Paul met it in a Christian manner. He respected the rights of Philemon, but appealed to him in the name of Christian charity. Particularly impressive is the calm and confident manner in which he made his plea. A practical resolution occasioned by the letter to Philemon would be: I will try to keep my correspondence free of verbiage and half-truths. I will write with tact, courtesy, and in the spirit of Christian sacrifice. I will act like a Christian not only in church but also in my letter-writing. Who can measure

the good influence of a letter written from the heart to one sorrowing or rejoicing!

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

God's kingdom grows exteriorly and interiorly

The last Sunday of the Christmas-Epiphany season! Its mystery is now fully unraveled, the mystery of Christ the King at work establishing the kingdom of heaven. Advent was the period of preparation for His coming. Christmas marked His arrival. On Epiphany He manifested His glory and began exercising His royal rights and duties. On the Sundays after Epiphany we witnessed the gradual growth and development of His realm. We saw our Redeemer as Teacher (first Sunday), as Priest (second Sunday), as healing Savior (third Sunday), as Conqueror (fourth Sunday), and as Judge (fifth Sunday). Today we marvel over the external and internal extension of His kingdom, a phenomenon illustrated by the parables of the mustard seed and of the leaven. — Rarely, however, does this Sunday occur during the Christmas-Epiphany season, being usually displaced by the liturgy of Septuagesima and the Easter cycle.

1. Divine Office. The theology proper to today's Divine Office is contained in the two Gospel parables and in the Readings from St. Paul's sublime Epistle to the Hebrews. In the second nocturn St. Athanasius, with chapter one of Hebrews in mind, comments on the pre-eminence of Christ over all the angels. Christ's supremacy and priesthood are most appropriate thoughts at the conclusion of the Christmas cycle. The two Gospel parables serve as the major antiphons at Lauds and Vespers. "The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed, which is the smallest of all the seeds; but when it grows up it is larger than any herb" (*Ben. Ant.*). "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and buried in three measures of flour, until

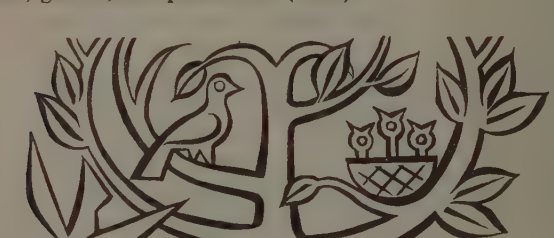
all of it was leavened" (*Magn. Ant.*). In the third nocturn St. Jerome associates the mustard seed with the knowledge of the Scriptures and the preaching of the gospel.

2. **Holy Mass (Adorate Deum).** As on previous Sundays, the chants proper to the Mass acclaim the great King "adored by the angels and surrounded by the exultant daughters of Sion." This, of course, is not the day's main theme. On the previous Sundays after Epiphany, we have seen the messianic King in His various functions and offices, namely, as healing Savior, as Conqueror, as patient Judge. Today, altering her approach slightly, the liturgy wishes to emphasize the steady, organic, and irresistible growth of God's kingdom. In spite of external and internal enemies (fourth and fifth Sundays), Christ's Church, like the mustard seed, grows outwardly from a small beginning to a mighty tree; and the nations of the world come like birds to dwell in her branches. Inwardly, a divine life is pulsating through her members, permeating and transforming them like leaven.

In the *Epistle* Mother Church presents a model Christian community and its model shepherd — a flesh and blood commentary on the Gospel. At the end of the Christmas cycle we might well examine our conscience to see whether we too would deserve such praise. "We are constantly thanking God for you . . . mindful of your active faith, your self-sacrificing love, your persevering hope." How do I stand in regard to these theological virtues? Daily I listen to the *Gospel* at holy Mass. Has it manifested itself within me "in power and the fullness of the Holy Spirit"? To what extent am I "a pattern to all believers"?

We should bear in mind, too, how in the Mass the Gospel turns into reality. The grain of mustard seed is the Eucharist; deposited in the soil of our soul, It should sprout and grow into a tree, the tree of a good Christian life. Holy Communion is also the leaven that a woman, Mother Church, takes and mixes thoroughly into the dough (Christian hearts) to effect a thorough transformation. Such is the role of the Eucharist. It is not the full-grown mustard seed or the baked loaf of leavened bread. Rather It is the leaven itself, and the tiny seed. It is a power or

force that becomes effective only through the cooperation of man's will. Today, may the holy Sacrifice, like leaven, "cleanse, renew, govern, and protect us" (*Secr.*).



3. Sunday Meditation. A. The Parable of the Grain of Mustard Seed. Our Lord compares the kingdom of heaven to a grain of mustard seed. The tiny seed is planted in a field or garden; it grows rapidly, resembles a tree in form and size, with branches large enough for birds to perch on. Some of our readers may have seen mustard plants, for they are cultivated in certain localities. Its seed is used to make common table mustard, and the plant serves medicinal purposes in the form of mustard plaster. The smallness of its seed was proverbial in the Orient. Birds relish the seed and flock to the plant's branches to peck the tiny black grains from the ripened pods. So much for the parable, it is familiar enough. Now its message.

By this parable, what did our Lord wish to teach His disciples and us? Primarily, His purpose was to reveal another mystery pertaining to the kingdom of heaven and to settle further doubts regarding its nature. It was time for Him to tell the apostles that the mass of Jewish people, including the Pharisees, would not become members of the kingdom. At first it would comprise only the small group of His immediate followers. This news could well have spelled disillusionment for the apostles. Had not the prophets pictured the messianic kingdom in universal terms,

embracing the whole world? Jesus must assure them; they would get the true approach from a parable. There would be a small beginning, but in time it would cover the face of the earth. The little story brought home two big truths: (a) the tiny mustard seed implied a small, unpretentious origin for the Church; (b) the growth and the relative greatness of the mature plant foreshadowed her spread throughout the world.

a) The small beginning. That God's kingdom should begin small was contrary to Jewish expectation; but it did harmonize perfectly with a fundamental principle of Christ's teaching. The law of humility, of lowly origins, lies at the very heart of Christianity, whether we take a full view or a passing glance, whether we study the individual soul or the Church as a whole. Jesus Himself was the first to exemplify it. Already as an Infant, from His cold cradle of straw, He proclaimed to the world the spirit of His kingdom. To this spirit He adhered consistently in His life and teaching.

It was the spirit He propounded in the Sermon on the Mount: Blessed are the poor, blessed are the meek, blessed are the persecuted and the disinherited of earth — *theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* At another time He thanked His heavenly Father because the mysteries of the kingdom were hidden from the wise and prudent, but revealed to little ones. How "small," i.e., derided and forsaken, did He become in His last hours; and on Calvary "He humbled Himself unto death, even death upon a Cross" in St. Paul's words. There on Golgotha He placed the small grain of mustard seed in the ground and sprinkled it heavily with His blood.

Since the Church is Christ, her character and nature must be Christ-like. Small, lowly, despised by the world — such was her origin. It was a small and needy group that the divine Shepherd assembled; but He told them with supreme confidence: "Fear not, My little flock; it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom." The precedent was set. Always and everywhere the Church begins small. The world's great and rich ignore her; the little ones, the blind, the lame, these become her members.

Nor is there any difference in the case of individuals. You must begin with humility and self-abasement; you must become humble, small. Foundations are laid in humility.

b) The huge, mature plant. The tiny seed grows into a great plant, picturing the Church's expansion. In a relatively short time Christianity had spread to every corner of the Roman Empire. The Acts of the Apostles describes that growth. Already on the first Pentecost thousands were baptized. Soon the Apostle of the Gentiles was sent forth to carry the gospel to Asia Minor and to Europe. In city after city he founded Christian communities, so that at the turn of the first century there was no locality about the Mediterranean where Christ had not gained a firm foothold. The Roman Emperors tried desperately to uproot the spreading plant; branches fell as the blood of martyrs flowed. But the tree grew. In 312 Emperor Constantine could not but grant the Church her freedom. Paganism had been overcome. The Church's resources had been the love, the faith, and heroic lives of her members. The grain of mustard seed sown on Golgotha had grown to a giant tree with branches extending into every nation.

B. The Parable of the Leaven. The two parables are closely related; one completes the other. The first treats the external, visible growth of God's kingdom; the second points up its inner transforming power and efficacy. The first emphasizes extension and numerical expansion, while the second stresses the spiritual change Christianity produces in individuals and in society.

As for the story itself, it had to do with a very familiar item in Jewish kitchens. Leaven had been in use from Israel's earliest history; we find it mentioned as far back as the flight from Egypt. Bread-baking was a daily task. Into a mess of flour, the women mixed a small portion of leaven or yeast, but that was enough to permeate and lighten the whole lump.

The point of comparison is not hard to detect. Even as the tiny mustard seed contains such vital potency as to become a great tree, so a small quantity of leaven possesses the force and strength to transform the whole batch of flour. The leaven's ac-

tivity takes places within the dough; hence the parable illustrates the penetrating and transforming effects of God's kingdom in souls and in the world. From its very beginning Christianity began to modify every aspect of life, whether of individuals, the family, or the state. It was, in truth, the leaven that changed the world, that "renewed the face of the earth." It constituted the greatest moral and intellectual revolution in history. This quality of Christianity, namely, its power to reform and remake, is very effectively portrayed by our Lord's simple little parable.

Examples of Christianity's transforming power would not be hard to find. Look what it did to slavery. The suppression of slavery is one of the Church's finest achievements in Roman times. Or think of the status to which paganism had reduced women and children. Or recall another dismal page of mankind's history, the sensuality and impurity of the ancient world. Contrast this with the Christian ideal of chastity!

The parable also touches me. Christianity should be a leaven in my heart; it must spiritualize my life too. Religion cannot be a closed-off compartment in my life, it must reach into and affect my work, my recreation, my suffering. My thoughts, my feelings, my desires, my speech, my love, all must be transformed by the leaven, Christ.

The Season's Finale

February 2

THE FEAST OF THE PURIFICATION or CANDLEMAS

My eyes have seen Your salvation

The feast of the Purification brings the Christmas-Epiphany season to its end. The theology proper to today's liturgy forms a fitting transition from Christmas to Easter. The small Christ-Child is still in His Mother's arms, but already she is offering Him in sacrifice.

1. The Feast. "This day the Blessed Virgin Mary presented the Child Jesus in the temple. Simeon, filled with the Holy Ghost, received Him into his arms and blessed God forever" (*2. Vesp., Magn. Ant.*).

The feast of the Purification is celebrated forty days after Christmas in keeping with the Latin Church's penchant to reflect Biblical time indications in the liturgy, e.g., the circumcision, the annunciation, the ascension, Pentecost, the nativity of St. John the Baptist.

Today's feast is primarily one in honor of our Lord; only secondarily is it Marian. To grasp its real significance we must associate it with the great solemnities of the winter cycle. Christ-

mas, Epiphany, Purification — these are the peaks of the current season. It would not be impossible to discover a gradual heightening in the season's "Light" motif and in man's response to the divine outpouring of Epiphany. On Christmas "the Light shines in the darkness" and only a few "receive it" — Mary and the shepherds at the crib. On Epiphany the Light casts its bright beams upon Jerusalem (the Church), "the glory of the Lord rises over Jerusalem," and the Gentiles come flocking out of the darkness to the City of Light. Lastly, on Candlemas Day, the Light is placed in our very hands, to hold during the procession and at Mass. Light, therefore, plays a notable role in today's liturgy.

Another observation. Today Mother Church as such steps to the fore and lovingly "receives God's Mercy (Incarnate) in her arms" (*Intr.*). It is precisely this heightening of the Church's role in the Christmas mystery that lends our celebration a singular beauty. On Christmas the Church remained quite in the background; attention centered upon the divine, newborn Infant. On Epiphany she appeared "adorned like a bride with the garment of salvation, and decked with jewels"; for the liturgy was celebrating her divine nuptials. The present feast continues the theme. The bride adorns her nuptial chamber and goes to meet her Spouse. Hence a bridal song is very appropriate:

Adorn your bridal chamber, O Sion,
and receive Christ, the King.
Greet Mary, the gate of heaven, with loving embrace;
for she bears the King of glory, the new Light.
There stands the Virgin, in her arms the Son
begotten before the day-star.
Simeon receives Him in his arms and proclaims to the nations:
He is the Lord of life and death, the Savior of the world.
(*Procession hymn*)

The hymn gives prominence to another important feature of today's liturgy, viz., our *meeting* Christ. The Greek Church very significantly calls the feast *Hypapante,* "the Meeting" or "En-

countering." In the temple (holy Church), mankind meets the Lord. At Matins the invitatory condenses the day's principal thoughts as follows: "Behold, the Lord and Ruler is come to His holy temple; rejoice and be glad in *meeting* your God, O Sion." At Mass too we stretch out our arms to receive the Bridegroom; that is why we sing Psalm 47 three times and its key verse: "We have received Your mercy, O Lord, in the midst of Your temple." Further texts showing the prominence of the "meeting" theme in the Mass and Office seem unnecessary. Because the aged Simeon played his part so well in the first, historical meeting with Christ, the liturgy again and again returns to this venerable servant of the Lord.

The feast's second major theme is Light. We are well familiar with the beautiful symbolism associated with light. Light means Christ and the supernatural life of grace. Today the Church, responding to Simeon's words, "the Light for the enlightenment of the Gentiles," keeps a genuine "light feast." (The feast was instituted to supplant the pagan *Lupercalia,* a licentious frolic featuring nocturnal torchlight parades. This explains why at the blessing of the candles and in the ensuing procession the celebrant and his ministers are vested in violet, the penitential color.)

Candles are blessed for liturgical use and are also distributed to the faithful. In homes they should be lighted on the occasion of family devotions, in times of storm, household crises, or other dangers; also at the Communion of the sick and at the administration of Extreme Unction. The Church, moreover, wishes these candles to remind us of our baptismal candles; for the candles we held at baptism signified our heavenly adoption and our duties in the lay priesthood of Christ. Year after year we again receive a baptismal candle so that "with burning lamp" we may hasten to meet the Bridegroom when He comes for the heavenly nuptials.

With consummate beauty the Church dramatizes light and its sacred message. From her hands we receive the blessed candle. (May we hope that priests will follow the rubrics and actually

distribute candles to the faithful.) The Church's action of giving her children candles is most significant. It is a sign that she never ceases to bring Christ to us and His divine life. As we carry the burning light, the sign of an ardent Christian life, in the procession, so ought we actually carry Christ among men. The procession ends in church, the house of God and symbol of heaven. For with Christ we are walking through life to God's heavenly home.

On two occasions during today's Mass the faithful light their candles and hold them, at the Gospel and during the Canon until Communion. For in the Gospel and during the Canon Christ is present in a special way. It is the reason why at a High Mass lighted candles and burning incense are introduced. The message which the Church wishes to tell us is this: Actually, you ought to hold burning candles in your hands at every Mass; ordinarily, however, acolytes perform that function in your stead. Today, however, you yourselves ought exercize the office of universal or lay priesthood. — Today's Mass, therefore, is truly a "*Candle*-Mass," practically the only one in the entire year. In Masses of the dead the faithful also carry candles, but for a different reason.

2. Divine Office. The Hours of Office accord Mary a prominent position; for this reason the psalms of Matins and Vespers are from the Common of the Blessed Virgin. The Vesper antiphons are the same as on the feast of the Circumcision; borrowed from the Greek liturgy, they display the vitality and verve of Orientals. Most of the responsories center attention on Simeon. Splendid meditation material can easily be drawn from the lessons of the second and third nocturn, by St. Augustine and St. Ambrose respectively. Here is an excerpt from the Doctor of Hippo:

"The aged Simeon recognized the Child, and through the Child became a child. He was rejuvenated in old age, he who was filled with faith. Simeon the old man held Christ the Child, while Christ ruled the old man Simeon. The Spirit had told him he would not taste death until he had seen the birth of the Lord's

Anointed. Christ was born, and the old man's yearning was satisfied in the world's old age. He comes to an old man, He who found the world grown old."

In his homily St. Ambrose speaks as follows:

" 'And behold, there lived in Jerusalem a man named Simeon. He was just and and God-fearing, and was awaiting Israel's consolation.' See, the Lord's incarnation was confirmed not only by angels, prophets, and shepherds, but also by old men and just men. Every age group, each sex, and many miraculous events offer support to our faith. The Virgin becomes a mother, the barren one gives birth, the dumb man speaks, Elizabeth prophesies, the Magi adore, one still hidden in his mother's womb leaps for joy, a widow breaks out in praise and song, a just man waits expectantly. Rightly is he called a just man, since he begs grace not for himself but for his people. He preferred to be loosed from the bonds of his mortal body; but he waited that he might see the Promised One. For he knew how 'blessed are the eyes that see Him.' He received Him in his arms, praised God, and said: 'Now, Lord, you may dismiss Your servant in peace, according to Your word.'

"See how this just man, still enclosed in his body as by a prison, see how he longs to be freed and be with Christ. For, to be freed and be with Christ is surely preferable. If you, too, seek to be delivered from the body, then come to the temple, come to Jerusalem, and there wait expectantly for the Lord's Anointed. Receive in your arms the Word of God; embrace It with your works, the arms, as it were, of your faith. Then you will be released, and you will not taste death because you have seen Life. How lavishly has grace been poured out upon mankind as a result of the Lord's incarnation! Nor was the gift of prophecy withheld from believers, only from unbelievers. Behold, Simeon prophesies! He prophesies that Christ Jesus our Lord came for the fall and the rise of many; that He would pass sentence on the merits both of the just and the godless; that according to the manner of our works He, the true and just Judge, would mete out punishment or reward."

3. Holy Mass. (a) Blessing of Candles and Procession. Doesn't it seem somewhat strange to find the ministers dressed in violet today and to hear the antiphon *Exsurge*, as on Rogation Days? How does this somber appearance accord with a feast of lights and a bridal procession? The reason would be that formerly the procession was, in part at least, a protest against the licentious revels of the pagans; we of the present time may regard it as an act of reparation in behalf of those whom the Light does not illumine. For, though it is "the Light of revelation unto the Gentiles," there are many who still prefer the darkness. The various prayers and chants constituting the text for the blessing of the candles provide ample material for several lengthy meditations. We would suggest a slow, prayerful reading of the whole rite, followed by a thoughtful analysis of content in the light of motifs and themes already indicated.

b) Holy Mass (*Suscepimus*). Like Simeon, we appear with arms outstretched to receive the Son of God, an excellent attitude during the Foremass (*Intr., Grad.*). It is especially easy today to see how in every Mass a twofold "meeting" takes place; there is the meeting of man's word and God's word in the Foremass; and in the Sacrifice proper man's bread meets God's Bread. The *Lesson*, taken from Malachias, the last of the prophets, tells how the Messiah would appear in the temple. In the *Gospel* that prophecy is fulfilled. It is fulfilled again in a higher manner, during the Sacrifice proper, when "the sovereign Ruler, the Messenger of the covenant," appears on our altar. Today He comes as "King of the new light," a light so bright that no mortal eye can endure it, so glowing that it refines our gold (*Lesson*). At the *Offertory* we accompany Mary to the altar; she offers not only a pair of doves, but the Son of God (*see* the chant as the procession re-enters the church). At holy *Communion* we take the role of Simeon who was privileged to hold the Lord's Anointed. The church where we are gathered is Jerusalem's temple (which explains the frequent mention of the temple in the Mass texts); to this temple (our church) Christ has come to meet us. Our final prayer (*Postc.*) is made through the inter-

cession of the Mother of God. So completely is the formulary devoted to Christ that Mary is given prominence in but two texts.

4. Reflections on the Feast. The liturgy brings to our attention a number of truths that deserve special consideration.

a) Several Old Testament prophets had foretold how the temple's greatest glory was reserved for the day when the Messiah appeared in its sacred precincts and revealed Himself. Their oracles are now fulfilled. Today Jesus enters His Father's house for the first time; in future years He will often manifest Himself there as the Messiah and the Son of God. Considerable prominence is given this truth; see, for example, the Introit, Gradual, and Epistle. And the temple of old typified the Church.

b) Today the Infant Savior is brought to the temple and offered to God. According to Mosaic Law every male firstborn was "holy to the Lord"; he was to be brought to the temple and "redeemed" by an offering. In our Lord's case the act assumed a deeper significance. God does not give His Son away gratis; His presentation at Mary's hands constituted, we may say, the Offertory of His life. If we align Christ's redemptive life with the Mass, His presentation in the temple would be the Offertory, His death on the Cross the consecration and elevation. Today the divine Lamb lies on the paten of sacrifice and is offered to the Father. Thirty-three years hence He will complete the act by dying on the Cross. Yes, this day commemorates the oblation of Christ's whole redemptive work, not excluding the offertory oblations of all believers.

c) Today our Blessed Mother offers her purificatory sacrifice as required by Mosaic Law (Leviticus). Actually Mary was not bound by the precept, for she was the purest of virgins, and her Son the spotless Lamb of God. Nevertheless, with humility and with a true spirit of sacrifice she brought the offering of the poor, a pair of doves. In imitation and in remembrance of her holy act, the Church commends to mothers a very laudable practice. I refer to the liturgical blessing given to mothers after childbirth (Churching of Women). As soon as the mother has recuperated, she comes to church with her babe. She thanks God

for the successful delivery and offers her beloved infant to the Lord; and the priest blesses both. The object of the blessing is not purification, as in the Old Testament — Christian mothers have no need of purification after childbirth. But Mary's humility is recognized and imitated by the new mother as she waits in the rear of the church, and from there follows the priest to the altar.

d) A very noble figure, the aged Simeon! Through many, many years he had desired the Messiah's coming. Now with the unquestioning faith of a child, he adores Israel's hope in a workman's needy Child. His glowing love causes him to feel young again as he takes the Infant in his arms. There is nothing more he wants from life. Having seen the Redeemer, he is overcome with gratitude and pours out from his soul the night prayer of his life: "Now, Lord, you may dismiss Your servant in peace."

His beautiful canticle, the *Nunc Dimittis,* has been incorporated into the Church's official night prayer (Compline), where it serves as an expression of thanksgiving for the graces and blessings of another day of redemption. As we sing it we see Simeon holding the Child Jesus in his arms and then, with grateful heart, retiring from his earthly service to God. We, too, are in the Lord's service. At the close of day we hold the Savior in our arms, mystically speaking; we hold Him in faith, in grace, in the sacraments, especially the Sacrament of the Altar. Fervently we thank God for His blessings; and we are prepared, if it be His will, to take our leave from the world. Yes, Lord, now You may dismiss me, Your servant. For with the eyes of faith I have again seen my Savior, Jesus. I, too, belong to the multitude of the elect. Christ is my salvation, my redemption, my Light; He enlightens the darkness of my mind and heart. He is my glory, my eternal recompense! Oh, that we could bring each day to a close with thoughts like these! How well they express the noblest sentiments of a Christian heart at the end of day. How beautiful would Simeon's prayer fall from the lips of the dying; it would be the night prayer to life.

5. A Christmas Remembrance. Candlemas marks the closing of the Christmas cycle. In remembrance of the divine gifts be-

stowed by the Christmas mystery, the Church gives us a candle. The candle's message is that we always retain *Emmanuel*, i.e., "God with us." God is with us in three ways. The Church indicates them by handing us a candle and requesting us to hold it at the Gospel and during the Canon, and to take it home after the service. Her action shows how we possess Christ (a) in the word of God, principally in the Gospel; (b) in the Eucharist; and (c) in grace. Aren't these wonderful Christmas gifts?

a) *The word of God.* Too many Christians have no true appreciation of God's word. To them it is a source of instruction and edification, of reassurance and admonition; but nothing more. They do not realize the sacramental power inherent in the divine word, or that this power is its highest endowment. In a sacrament God comes and brings grace. By His word God also comes and brings grace. God's word is a seed bursting with life. Still, it is not a magic power. It produces its effect only in hearts with suitable soil. Human cooperation is always needed.

b) That the *Eucharist* brings Christ everyone accepts. What is perhaps not so well understood is how the Eucharist sustains and increases supernatural life in the soul. Christ's flesh is the manna that nourishes us on this earthly journey; it is the seed of glory and the pledge of resurrection.

c) The *candle* we receive today betokens our baptismal candle. The Church presupposes that we will use it, lighting it piously on various occasions. For this reason she gives us a new one each year. She likewise presupposes that we have not forgotten what she told us at baptism: "Receive this lighted candle, and keep your baptism above reproach. Keep the commandments of God, so that when the Lord comes to His marriage feast you may meet Him in the halls of heaven with all His saints, and may live with Him forever." Yes, the candle received on Candlemas Day ought be a reminder of our baptismal grace, of *Christ in us,* Emmanuel. On earth there is no way of coming closer to Him. Only in heaven will we be nearer; then we will see and enjoy Him face to face.

The Proper of the Saints

The Proper of The Saints

Did you ever wonder how a mountain climber feels as he is about to leave the snow-covered heights for the plain below? Yes, his heart aches. With a similar heartache we now must bid farewell to the feasts of Christmas-Epiphany and return to the common calendar. Even its name is lacklustre, *tempus per annum*, time through the year. We realize, of course, not every day can be a feast; there must be ordinary days, or the feasts themselves would soon grow dull. But we are Christians and being already citizens of heaven, solemnity and song are second nature, as we seek to live in anticipation of heaven's eternal feast. We must have feasts, though it may mean calling the weekdays *feria,* feast day. Look up Matins on December 31; it tells how Pope St. Sylvester "retained the names 'Saturday' and 'Sunday' but the other days of the week he wished to be called *feriae*, a practice that had already been introduced in the Church. It was to show that the clergy had detached themselves from all earthly interests and were devoting themselves day after day to God alone." St. Sylvester's ordinance is not without its message for present-day Catholics.

To return to our first analogy. We are now descending from the heights to the plain below, to the ordinary days of the year. Still, not all has been left behind. One who has scaled the peaks remembers the experience; and the little hills of his homeland become lovelier. The great King who visited our city — is it all a thing of the past? Yes and no. In the sacred drama of the liturgy He no longer appears, yet daily as "Orient from on high" He comes to "visit" us. His appearance now resembles a *pasch*, i.e., a passing-by rather than a solemn, royal visit. And the Eucharist becomes a "daily bread."

In the plain at the mountain's base the saints are standing, waiting to welcome and guide us through ordinary days. Let us lovingly take their hand and retain their company during the

days to come. How will the saints benefit us? By their lives and example they become our teachers and models, stars in the night skies of life by which we may sail a straight course to God. Moreover, they plead and intercede for us in heaven, a mediation we ask for again and again in the liturgy. Nevertheless their greatest function is to act as mediators of grace. By reason of the Communion of Saints, they supply the graces we still lack. They are the chosen vessels of divine grace; not their virtues but God's love makes them great. When we go to meet the Bridegroom at the holy Sacrifice, they lend us their wedding garments to cover our nakedness. It is with their merits, and even in their stead, that we appear before God at Mass and in prayer. How profoundly the liturgy defines our veneration of the saints! The Collect on the feast of St. Felix (January 14) emphasizes moral inspiration: "May the examples of the saints urge us on to a better life; and may we imitate the deeds of those whose feasts we celebrate." As the eagle coaxes her young toward the sun, so the saints must draw us upward from the hollows of earthly life toward the divine Sun reigning in heaven.

January 14

ST. HILARY, Bishop and Doctor
ST. FELIX, Priest and Martyr

With a spiderweb God can protect His children

1. St. Hilary. *Day of death*: November 1, 367. *Grave*: in the cathedral of Parma (Italy). His feast has been part of the Roman calendar since Pius IX. *Life*. St. Hilary was one of those great Christian heroes who poured out their lives laboring and suffering in defense of Christ's divinity. Scarcely had the days of bloody persecution ended (313), when there arose, now within the Church, a most dangerous enemy of another sort, Arianism.

The heresy of Arianism denied the divinity of Christ; it was, in fact, hardly more than a form of paganism masquerading as the Christian Gospel. The smoldering strife soon flared into a mighty conflict endangering the whole Church; and its spread was all the more rapid and powerful because emperors, who called themselves Christian, proved its best supporters. Once again countless martyrs sealed in blood their belief in Christ's divinity; and orthodox bishops who voiced opposition were forced into exile amid extreme privations.

Among the foremost defenders of the true faith stood Hilary. He belonged to a distinguished family and had received an excellent education. Though a married man, he was made bishop of Poitiers by reason of his exemplary life. It was not long before his valiant defense of the faith precipitated his exile to Phrygia. Here he composed his great work on the Blessed Trinity (in twelve books). It is a vigorous defense of the faith, which, he said, "triumphs when attacked." Finally, after four years he was permitted to return to his native land. He continued his efforts, and through prudence and mildness succeeded in ridding Gaul of Arianism. Because of his edifying and illustrious writings in behalf of the true religion, the Church honors him as one of her doctors.

Here is an example of Hilary's vigorous style: "Now it is time to speak, the time for silence is past. We must expect Christ's return, for the reign of Antichrist has begun. The shepherds must give the warning signals because the hirelings have fled. Let us lay down our lives for the sheep, for brigands have entered the fold and the roaring lion is rampaging about. Be ready for martyrdom! Satan himself is clothed as an angel of light." A favorite motto of St. Hilary was, *Ministros veritatis decet vera proferre*, "Servants of the truth ought speak the truth."

2. St. Felix. *Day of death*: January 14, 260 (?). *Grave*: at Nola (Campagna). *Life.* In one of the early persecutions the priest Felix was first tortured on the rack, then thrown into a dungeon. While lying chained on broken glass, an angel appeared, loosed his bonds, and led him out to freedom. Later,

when the persecution had subsided, he converted many to the Christian faith by his preaching and holy example. However, when he resumed his denunciation of pagan gods and false worship, he was again singled out for arrest and torture; this time he escaped by hiding in a secret recess between two adjacent walls. No sooner had he disappeared into the nook than a thick veil of cobwebs formed over the entrance so that no one suspected he was there. Three months later he died in peace (260), and is therefore a martyr only in the wider sense of the word.

St. Paulinus of Nola (*see* June 22), who cherished a special devotion toward St. Felix, composed fourteen hymns (*carmina natalicia*) in his honor. In his day (fifth century) the saint's tomb was visited by pilgrims from far and wide and was noted for its miraculous cures. *Application.* Let us be convinced that if we strive and struggle in God's behalf, we may also rely on His special protection. God shields you from your enemies even, if need be, by a spider's web.

3. The Mass from the Common of Doctors (*In medio*), is a good example of liturgical dramatics. In the officiating priest the Church sees the day's saint (a point which makes the chants more intelligible). Thus, when the celebrant in priestly vestments approaches the altar, we sing: "In the midst of the Church God opens his mouth; the Lord fills him with wisdom and understanding. And He clothes him with the robe of glory" (*Intr.*). Today again the holy doctor speaks in God's Church, this time to us. The priestly vestments represent the *stola gloriae*, the robe of glory. The *Collect* shows how a doctor of the Church plays a double role for us; he is a *doctor vitae*, a teacher of life (i.e., a guide in practical morality, and one who unravels the mysteries of God); secondly, he acts as our intercessor in heaven.

In the *Epistle* we see the saint walking in the footsteps of St. Paul. Like the great apostle, he was a fearless, untiring defender and preacher of God's kingdom — *in season, out of season* — doing the "work of an evangelist." See how the Mass texts come to life when we read them in the light of the saint's life! This, his day of death, was for him the day of the Lord's return; his

sentiments could truly be: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course; now there is reserved for me the crown of justice, which the Lord, the just Judge, will give to me on that day." And the Mass enables us to share with the saint his experience of the Lord's return.

According to the *Gospel* our holy doctor is the salt of the earth, the light of the world, the city set on a mountain (bishops sit on an elevated throne), the lamp placed on a lampstand in the house of the Lord. In our own lesser way we should also become lights, kindling our light from his. He is called "great in the kingdom of heaven" because of what "he did and what he taught."

When we go to the altar with our gifts, the saint is "multiplied" in us; he is like the palm or cedar that "multiplies" itself as we identify ourselves with him, *sicut cedrus multiplicabitur* (*Off.*). At the *Communion* we again see our holy doctor, this time in the priest distributing the holy Eucharist. Our thoughts go back to the early Church. Before us is Hilary the bishop exercising his functions as preacher and priest. In the Foremass we heard him teach; in the holy Sacrifice we see him distributing the Bread of heaven. Both are God's wheat (doctrine and Eucharist), which the steward of God's household "prudently and faithfully" dispenses. Today, in the spirit of Hilary, this same wheat is dispensed to us. At Matins we read one of St. Hilary's homilies. The Church loves to have the day's saint speak to us directly.

4. The Blessed Trinity. St. Hilary wrote an important treatise on the Most Blessed Trinity. In his honor the preface of Holy Trinity is still sung at Poitiers on his feast day. With baptism, our life was sealed in the Triune God: "I baptize you in the Name of the Father. . . ." The words imply: You are the property of the Blessed Trinity; you belong to the Father who created you, to the Son who redeemed you, and to the Holy Spirit who sanctified you. Consequently, your whole life, all your toil and suffering and prayer, should be in the service of the Most Blessed Trinity. Sunday, introducing and sanctifying the week, is the day par excellence devoted to the Blessed Trinity.

What fervor and devotion should characterize our prayers to the Blessed Trinity, the sign of the Cross, for instance, which we make so often. How laudable and inspiring to begin our day, our work and prayer "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." Like a mighty refrain the *Gloria Patri* ends every psalm and canticle in the Divine Office. The *Gloria in excelsis* is the Mass's pre-eminent song of praise to the Trinity; pray it, sing it often. It is an ancient, charismatic hymn and was formerly sung only when the bishop officiated at Mass. It was also a leading Easter hymn. Like the Gloria, the *Te Deum* dates back to the charismatic days of the Church. The Credo, the Preface of the Blessed Trinity, the Athanasian Creed, these are solemn and profound prayer forms; we should pray them with due thoughtfulness and piety.

Note, too, how the entire Foremass is cast in a Trinitarian mold. The *Kyrie* petitions and the *Gloria* praises the Trinity. The Oration never concludes without addressing the three divine Persons; through Christ, with the Holy Spirit, to the Father. In reply to this Trinitarian prayer service comes God's word in the Epistle, Christ's word in the Gospel, the Holy Spirit's word in the sermon. The Credo brings the Foremass to an end. It would be interesting and profitable to make a similar Trinitarian survey of the Mass of the Faithful.

Our task in life is to build a temple in which the Blessed Trinity may dwell. "He who loves Me will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him" (John 14:23). "Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells in you?" (1 Cor. 6:19).

January 15

ST. PAUL, First Hermit, Confessor
ST. MAURUS, Abbot

Silence and obedience are prerequisites for liturgical living

1. St. Paul. *Day of death*: (according to the Roman Martyrology) January 10, 347, at the age of 113 years. *Grave*: major relics in Rome at St. Peter's and St. Mary's on the Capitoline Hill. *Picture*: a hermit clothed in palm leaves, with a raven. *Life*. He is called "the first hermit" in the Missal and Breviary, a rare distinction, for such titles are seldom appended. Our saint was the standard-bearer of those courageous men who for the love of Christ left the world and entered the wilderness to dedicate themselves wholly to contemplation amid all the privations of desert life. The hermits were the great men of prayer in those difficult times when the Church was locked in fierce struggle with heresy after heresy. For centuries the example of their lives served as the school of Christian perfection. Their action set the background for the rise of monasticism and religious orders in the Church.

The Breviary retains an edifying legend concerning today's saint. One day St. Anthony, then ninety, was divinely inspired to visit the hermit Paul. Though they had never met previously, each greeted the other correctly by name. While they were conversing at length on spiritual matters, the raven that had always brought Paul half a loaf of bread, came with a whole loaf. As the raven flew away, Paul said: "See, the Lord, who is truly good and merciful, has sent us food. Every day for sixty years I have received half a loaf, but with your arrival Christ sent His servants a double ration." Giving thanks, they ate by a spring.

After a brief rest, they again gave thanks, as was their custom, and spent the whole night praising God. At daybreak Paul informed Anthony of his approaching death and asked him to fetch the cloak he had received from St. Athanasius, that he might wrap himself in it. Later, as Anthony was returning from his

visit, he saw Paul's soul ascending to heaven escorted by choirs of angels and surrounded by prophets and apostles. Further traditional matter may be found in *The Life of Paul the Hermit,* written by St. Jerome about the year 376.

2. St. Maurus. *Day of death*: January 15, 584 (?). *Grave*: according to a late tradition (eleventh century) at Glanfeuil (St. Maur sur Loire). *Life.* In Benedictine history Maurus holds a distinguished place, taught and trained by St. Benedict himself. While still very young, Maurus and another youth, Placid, were brought by their parents to be reared in monastic life by the Patriarch of Monks. An incident reveals Maurus' spirit of childlike obedience. One day Placid was sent to a near-by lake to draw water. Soon he was at the shore, where, boy that he was, he fell victim to his own heedlessness. Eager to fill the vessel quickly, he reached out too far and was dragged in by the rapidly filling jar. He was being borne along by the waves when from his cell St. Benedict realized what had happened. "Hurry, run to the lake! Placid has fallen in!" he called to Maurus. Stopping only for his spiritual father's blessing, Maurus sped to the lake, seized Placid by the hair and brought him ashore.

Imagine his shock and amazement when he realized that he had run some distance on water! His explanation? Such a miracle could not have happened save by virtue of his master's command! St. Gregory relates the incident in his *Second Book of Dialogues* along with much other interesting detail from the life of St. Benedict. The Martyrology makes this comment on the miracle: How greatly he advanced in faith under his teacher (St. Benedict) is attested by an occurrence unheard of since the days of St. Peter; for, on one occasion he walked upon water as though it were dry land. — The tradition that Maurus later became abbot at Glanfeuil in France lacks historical support.

3. Holy Mass (Justus). In the Mass formulary the life of St. Paul the Hermit is reflected very beautifully. The *Introit* (also the *Gradual*) compares him to a palm tree; we think of his life in the desert, where the palm afforded shelter and nourishment. The *Epistle*, one of the more renowned passages in St. Paul's

writings, was heroically exemplified in the life of today's saint: "What was gain to me, I have counted loss for the sake of Jesus Christ. I looked upon all things as dung, that I might gain Christ in becoming like to Him in death and thus attain to resurrection."

In the *Gospel* Christ sketches a portrait of Himself. It is a magnificent passage, a pity it never occurs on a Sunday. Jesus shows Himself, on the one hand, as the mighty and eternal Son of God to whom all things have been delivered by the Father and who possesses the inmost knowledge of God; on the other, as the merciful Savior, meek and humble of heart, who refreshes the wearied and burdened. He may place a yoke on our shoulders, but it is a burden that soon becomes "sweet and light."

These two edifying excerpts should fill our minds as we continue the Sacrifice. The Epistle provides very suitable thought for the *Offertory*; the ideal it holds up to us is a noble one: "Not as though I had already arrived or were perfect, but I strive after perfection, if by any means I may acquire of it." In the Sacrifice the Christ of the Gospel appears on the altar, our God and our Savior. And at the *Communion* He bends down to refresh and quicken us.

4. The Saints: Teachers of Virtue. Today's feast is a good illustration of the role saints ought play in our lives. They are our tutors unto perfection. The Church unfolds the panorama of their life story, focuses attention on their principal virtues, and urges imitation. Now, what means does the Church employ for this purpose? Matins provides us with a summary account of the saint's life; and, if possible, some of the Lessons are culled from his own writings. The Church stresses example, knowing that *words edify, but example moves to action.*

Frequently, the Collect underlines the particular virtue in which the saint excelled, and implores God for the grace to imitate it. The Oration is like a basin into which flow our daily petitions from the eight canonical Hours, only to flow out again and be answered in the Eucharist. Usually the Epistle and Gospel profile the saint's character in words from Holy Writ; these

Readings should ring in our minds during the whole day. It will help if we note key sentences or phrases that can be recalled at opportune times. By such practice our daily life can be charged with the sacramental power of God's holy word. In some Masses other variable parts besides the ones mentioned are chosen or formulated with special reference to the saint. For the Church uses every approach to present a vivid portrait of each day's saint, one we should think upon and act upon as the day progresses.

The two saints we honor today teach us to love solitude, silence, and obedience. Solitude and silence are the soul's cloister. "While all things lay in quiet silence" the Son of God came into the world. So also does He come to a soul that loves silence and solitude, for in the clamor and bustle of the world, God's voice cannot be heard. Obedience is presupposed in every child of God. Disobedience brought sin into the world, the Son of God's obedience merited redemption and heaven. Today's best meditation material would be the Epistle and Gospel.

January 16

ST. MARCELLUS, Pope and Martyr

A truth-loving pope, who ordered apostates
to weep for their crime; to all the wicked a bitter foe.
Hence came rage, hatred, dissension, strife, revolt, murder.
Broken were the bonds of (the Church's) freedom.
For the crime of another, who in time of peace denied Christ,
Marcellus was banished by the cruel tyrant.[1]
(St. Damasus' epitaph for Pope Marcellus)

1. St. Marcellus. *Day of death*: January 16, 309. *Grave*: in Rome, at the cemetery of St. Priscilla; later, in a church dedi-

[1] *See* Schuster, *Liber Sacramentorum* VI, 134.

cated to his honor on the Via Lata. *Life.* Marcellus ruled as pope for two years (308–309) during the last great persecution under Emperor Maxentius. According to the epitaph composed by St. Damasus, Marcellus admitted those who had denied the faith (the *lapsi*) to penance and reconciliation. This action drew upon him the wrath of the rigorist, intolerant faction among the Donatists. There was a popular uprising, and blood flowed. These disorders provided Maxentius with a pretext for condemning the Pope to banishment. He died of hardships and privations. — According to the (apocryphal) Acts of the saint, a church was dedicated to him in his lifetime at the home of a devout widow. Maxentius heard of it, converted the church into a stable, and forced Marcellus to act as its caretaker.

2. **Holy Mass (Si diligis me).** For an explanation see page 170. The *Oration* is proper.

3. **Are There Martyrs Today?** There was a time when we read about the early martyrs and felt that we never would or could resemble them. Such bravery and virtue, we thought, could be marveled at and admired, but never repeated. No one, then, expected to see a new era of bloody persecution. Now we know that the persecutions and suffering of the last decades rival in every way those of the early Church. In Spain, thousands of priests and lay people were put to death under every imaginable torture. Horrifying incidents are related. Old and feeble bishops were forced to perform the most degrading work, were flogged as they were marched through the streets; and when they fell to the ground, they were stamped to death by rabid women.

Similar atrocities are now happening in Iron Curtain countries. Because of their religion vast numbers of Catholics have been condemned to concentration camps where, meagerly clad and half starved, they must toil day after day, Sundays included. There is no doubt but that every kind of torture inflicted upon the early martyrs has its modern counterpart; and the number singled out to die for Christ is easily equally great. From these twentieth-century witnesses to the faith we have learned that martyrdom is not as much beyond our reach as we had thought.

Those who have suffered and died, priests, Sisters, lay persons, were not very different from us; as human beings they had their weaknesses and imperfections. But martyrdom was like a sacrament by which they rose above themselves. It supplied what strength they lacked and helped them attain the heights of holiness. It is, therefore, not impossible for us, too, to become martyrs.

What, then, is required to be a martyr? First of all, no one can gain martyrdom by his own strength or struggling; it is a grace from God. Only God's grace has the power to transport us to such heights as to be suddenly changed from average Christians into religious heroes and heroines. Martyrdom resembles the Holy Spirit's descent upon Christ's disciples. Before that divine outpouring, they were very much like other men, subject to weaknesses and imperfections, as can be seen in the Gospels. But after the sacrament of the Holy Spirit, they were completely transformed. This is the first point: martyrdom is the work of grace. That grace must seize us like a divine centrifugal force; without it we would be diverted much too much to selfish tangents.

Nevertheless, we must also contribute our part. This contribution seems indicated by the words of the Canon, *fides et devotio*, faith and complete self-surrender. The faith of a martyr must be strong and steadfast, its foundation rock firm. Such faith we must seek to attain and live by; exactly here, in the daily practice of our faith, can we do much to secure and further grace. Equally necessary is a complete self-surrender to God. Without it there is no piety or spirituality. Remember Mary's words: "I am the Lord's handmaid." And her Son prayed: "Not as I will, but as You will." We say the same in the Our Father: "Thy will be done!" Such resignation implies habitual obedience to God's commands and inspirations. It implies persevering, daily effort. The Church shows the importance of self-surrender by including it in the Mass action. The Offertory consists, in part, of one's self-oblation; for, by the gift we bring, we offer ourselves and become worthy to offer Christ's sacrifice. Thus, the oblation of self and Christ readies us for the crucible of martyrdom.

January 17

ST. ANTHONY, Abbot

Resist the devil

1. St. Anthony. *Day of death*: January 17, 356. *Grave*: first in an unknown place on Mount Kolzin by the Red Sea; in 561 his remains were brought to Alexandria; according to an ancient tradition they now are at St. Julien in Arles. *Picture*: as a hermit with crosier (shaped after the Egyptian cross, in the form of a T), book, beggar's bell, and pig (symbol of the devil's temptations). Considerable time elapsed before his feast became part of the Roman calendar. *Life.* Anthony "the Great," the "Father of Monks," ranks with those saints whose life exercised a profound influence upon succeeding generations. He was born in Middle Egypt (about 250) of distinguished parents. After their untimely deaths, he dedicated himself wholly to acts of mortification.

One day while in church he heard the words of the Gospel: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have, and give it to the poor" (Matt. 19:21). It seemed as if Christ had spoken to him personally, giving a command he must obey. Without delay he sold his property, gave the proceeds to the poor, and went into the desert (about 270). When overcome by fatigue, his bed was the hard ground. He fasted rigorously, ate only bread and salt, and never drank anything except water. Nor would he take food before sundown; and at times he passed two days without any nourishment at all. Often, too, he spent whole nights in prayer.

The saint suffered repeatedly from diabolical attacks, but these merely made him more steadfast in virtue. He would encourage his disciples in their struggle with the devil with such words: "Believe me, the devil fears the vigils of pious souls, and their fastings, their voluntary poverty, their loving compassion, their humility, but most of all their ardent love of Christ our Lord. As soon as he sees the sign of the Cross, he flees in terror." He died in 356 on Mount Kolzin by the Red Sea, 105 years old. A

year later his friend, the fearless bishop and confessor St. Athanasius, wrote his biography, which for centuries became the classic handbook of ascetics. As seen by St. Anthony, the purpose of asceticism is not to destroy the body but to bring it into subjection, re-establishing man's original harmonious integrity, his true God-given nature.

2. Holy Mass (Os justi). The Mass is from the Common of Abbots, but the Gospel (of the Watchful Servant) is proper. In the formulary the Church indicates the principal aspects under which we should consider the saint. First and foremost, he is the great Hermit, Abbot, and Father of Monks. Then he is the saint of silence. Solitude is the mother of wise and prudent thoughts, and silence teaches the proper use of the tongue (*Intr.*). In the *Epistle* Anthony is extolled as a second Moses, beloved by God and men. His mere word put demons to rout, as we know from his life; and God glorified him in the sight of kings and peoples. His "meekness" and "faith" too are praised. In the literal sense the Lesson refers to Moses; note the mention of the cloud by which God led him through the desert. Associating St. Anthony with Moses lends itself easily to edifying reflections. By the example and influence of our saint, the same Egyptian desert through which Moses led his people was populated by hermits and monks.

For the *Gospel* the Church sets aside the Common of Abbots and selects for use the parable of the watchful servant. Such was our saint. All his life he carried the "burning lamp" of the love of God, and with "loins girt" by most rigorous mortification awaited the Lord's return. Now he reclines at the heavenly wedding banquet. The Mass not only images that banquet but draws upon its glory. Today's text again shows how the formularies of the Common do not become thoroughly intelligible and meaningful unless we have related them to the saint's life.

3. St. Anthony's Biography. It has long been a practice of the Church to read the life of a saint on his feast. I would recommend that my readers provide themselves with standard lives of the saints from ancient or modern times, or with other books that

present a given saint in his true light. When the saint's feast day occurs, his biography could be prominently displayed in the home, suggesting his presence. Moreover, the work could serve as spiritual reading for the feast itself and for the octave, at least in some cases. Second to none among such worthwhile biographies would be St. Athanasius' *Life of St. Anthony*, the life of a saint by a saint. In this little book Christians down through the centuries have found spiritual edification and profit; it was instrumental in converting many souls, including, for instance, St. Augustine, as we learn from his *Confessions*.

St. Anthony lived in solitude for about twenty years. "His was a perfectly purified soul. No pain could annoy him, no pleasure bind him. In him was neither laughter nor sadness. The sight of the crowd did not trouble him, and the warm greetings of so many men did not move him. In a word, he was thoroughly immune to the vanities of the world, like a man unswervingly governed by reason, established in inner peace and harmony."

Here are a few of his famous sayings to monks. "Let it be your supreme and common purpose not to grow weary in the work you have begun, and in time of trial and affliction not to lose courage and say: Oh, how long already have we been mortifying ourselves! Rather, we should daily begin anew and constantly increase our fervor. For man's whole life is short when measured against the time to come, so short, in fact, that it is as nothing in comparison with eternity. . . . Therefore, my children, let us persevere in our acts of asceticism. And that we may not become weary and disheartened, it is good to meditate on the words of the apostle: 'I die daily.' If we live with the picture of death always before our eyes, we will not sin. The apostle's words tell us that we should so awaken in the morning as though we would not live to evening, and so fall asleep as if there were to be no awakening. For our life is by nature uncertain and is daily meted out to us by Providence. If we are convinced of this and live each day as the apostle suggests, then we will not fall into sin; no desire will enslave us, no anger move us, no treasure bind us to earth; we will await death with unfettered hearts."

January 18

ST. PETER'S CHAIR AT ROME
ST. PRISCA, Virgin and Martyr

The patronal feast of Roman liturgy

1. St. Peter's Chair. Today the Church commemorates St. Peter's arrival in Rome to teach and rule as bishop of the Eternal City. There seems to be an allusion to this event of far-reaching importance in the Acts of the Apostles. The twelfth chapter relates how the Prince of the Apostles was imprisoned by King Herod Agrippa, how he was miraculously released by an angel, how that same night he visited the assembled Christian community, gave them some necessary instructions, and then "departed and went to another place" (12:17). It is not said where Peter went, but tradition points to Rome. The episode occurred about the year 43 A.D. It has been piously believed, therefore, that Peter was bishop of Rome for the twenty-five years prior to his death in 67 A.D.

In 1558 Pope Paul IV instituted the feast of Peter's Chair at Rome and ordered its solemn observance annually on January 18. Until that time there had been the feast of Peter's Pontificate on February 22. By Pope Paul's decree January 18 became the feast of Peter's Chair at Rome; while February 22 would mark the founding of the Church at Antioch, where Peter had been bishop before coming to the Eternal City. Thus, there came into existence two feasts of a similar nature. There is evidence pointing to the presence of the venerable "chair of Peter" in the baptistery of old St. Peter's Church in the fifth century. At the present time it is reserved in the apse of the Vatican basilica. The precious relics now consist of hardly more than a few pieces of wood, which for centuries have been fastened and held together by ivory bands appropriately figured. During the Renaissance the entire composite was set into a huge reliquary, the work of Bernini.

2. St. Prisca. The Martyrology reads: "In the city of Rome,

the holy virgin and martyr Prisca; after many tortures she gained the crown of martyrdom under Emperor Claudius II (about 270)." Prisca should not be confused with Priscilla, the wife of Aquila, mentioned in the Acts, whose feast dates to the earliest days of Christianity.

3. Holy Mass (Statuit). The Mass formulary, a recent composition, brings into our midst Rome's first bishop, Peter, the Prince of the Apostles. At the *Introit* he appears in the person of the officiating priest. In the *Epistle* (written by Peter himself — the first papal encyclical) we hear him address us as "the elect, the strangers of the dispersion." He proclaims the joyful tidings of an incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading inheritance, reserved for us in heaven. For "a little while," to be sure, we must now be purified like gold in the fire of sundry trials, to be readied for the revelation of Jesus Christ, a foretaste of which is had at holy Mass.

In the *Gospel* we relive with St. Peter the memorable experience at Caesarea Philippi when Jesus made him the rock foundation of the Church. Our souls, too, must have a solid footing for the kingdom of God. The words, "You are Peter," re-echo as the leitmotif of the formulary (*All., Off., Comm.*); they apply both to Peter and to us. In the *Gradual* the Church acclaims Peter's "exaltation" to the Chair of Rome (*in cathedra seniorum*), and with the holy Eucharist Christ continues to "build His Church" (*Comm.*).

4. The Roman Liturgy. Today's feast has special significance for us as liturgists. It is a forceful reminder that our liturgy is actually the liturgy of the city of Rome. For the most part we commemorate Roman saints, and we observe the dedication of Roman churches. At least a hundred times a year the stational church takes us to Rome, where in spirit we offer the Sacrifice with its Bishop. Love for the liturgy means love for its original home, love for Rome as our great *arch*-diocese.

Doubtless, things might have been different. Had the liturgy continued its course of the first three centuries, the Christian nations of the West might each have had their own patriarchate

Into your arms take CHRIST,
the King of Glory,
the new LIGHT ✚

and their own liturgy. It might then have been easier to feel at home in the liturgy. Still, we must cherish what we have, not what might have been. We should learn to unite ourselves with the Roman Church, for we are members of that community. Often in the course of a year our parish church represents some basilica or church in Rome and our devotion and understanding of the liturgy's text is heightened if we celebrate the holy mysteries in spiritual union with the Bishop of that city. Today's feast should help correct any misunderstanding.

It may be asked what constitutes the chief difference between our present celebration and that of Sts. Peter and Paul on June 29. In the latter we honor the Apostle and first Vicar of Christ, the Ruler of the Universal Church. Today we honor the Bishop of the Church at Rome, the patriarchate of which we are members (hence the Office is from the Common of Confessors). It is, in a way, the patronal feast of our Roman liturgy.

January 19

STS. MARIUS, MARTHA, AND SONS, Martyrs ST. CANUTE, King and Martyr

We need families with heroic faith

1. St. Marius and Family. *Day of death*: unknown, probably during the Diocletian persecution. *Grave*: at Rome, in the Deaconry of St. Hadrian and in the titular church St. Praxedes. Their feast does not appear in the Roman calendar until the twelfth century. *Life*. The Acts of these martyrs are wholly legendary. They give the following details. Marius was a Persian of noble extraction. With his wife, who was also noble-born, and his two sons, Audifax and Abachus, he came to Rome during the reign of Emperor Claudius II (268–270) to venerate the graves of the martyrs. They visited the Christians in prison, encouraged

them by word and deed, and shared with them their goods. And like Tobias of old, they buried the bodies of the saints.

It was not long before they themselves were arrested; and when neither threats nor allurements could make them offer sacrifice to the idols, they were savagely flogged. Martha was the first to die, but not before she had fervently exhorted her husband and sons to endure steadfastly whatever tortures might be inflicted for the faith. All were beheaded in the same place and their bodies thrown into the fire. Felicitas, a saintly Roman woman, succeeded in recovering the half-burnt bodies and buried them on her estate. — Our devotion to historical truth prevents comment upon hagiography apocryphal in character.

2. **St. Canute,** king of Denmark, was murdered in St. Alban's Church, Odense, July 10, 1086. The Martyrology confuses him with his nephew, St. Canute the Duke, who died on January 7, 1131, and was canonized November 8, 1169, by Pope Alexander III. King St. Canute was canonized in the year 1100 by Pope Paschal II.

3. **Holy Mass (Justi epulentur).** The great saints of the Middle Ages and of more recent times are perhaps better known to us than some of the early martyrs; nevertheless, the feasts of those primitive heroes of Christianity should evoke our highest respect and admiration. What strength of faith, what courage and steadfastness in suffering, what love of Christ is shown by their self-oblation unto death, that very act that conformed them most perfectly with Him! They were the seed that produced the rich harvest of Christian peoples, including ourselves. That is why the Mass on the feast of a martyr should evoke a sympathetic response in our hearts. To attain this end the Church lends her efforts by transporting us in spirit to the scene of the martyr's tomb and offering the holy Sacrifice over his grave. There, by means of the holy Mysteries, the martyrs renew their own supreme sacrifice, merging it with Christ's redemptive death. Our faith is strengthened, and we participate in their glory. It would be good to define martyrdom as a continuation and repetition of Christ's death in His Mystical Body.

Formularies for martyrs are not a rarity in the Missal; besides three different texts in the Common, there are a number of Masses proper to individual martyrs. These formularies are very ancient and reflect the lofty sentiments of the primitive Church; indeed, they seem like a flashback from ancient catacomb liturgy.

Today's Mass is composed largely of texts from the Common. The *Introit* transposes us to the heavenly marriage feast, where the just (our martyrs) are rejoicing and feasting in God's presence. The *Epistle* is a most inspiring passage; the Church brings out the portraits of our illustrious ancestors (God's family) and urges us to be worthy of them. We belong to a family of martyrs; if we cannot bring ourselves to rejoice in suffering for Christ, at least let us accept it with patience and trust in God. At the end the Epistle mentions the Lord's Second Coming, a consideration that proved such a great incentive to primitive piety: "Yet a very little while, and He who is to come, will come; He will not delay." Today's *Alleluia* verse is a very early liturgical chant: "God is wonderful in His saints." Surely this is one of the reasons why the Church keeps a saint's feast day almost every day of the year, *to have us marvel at the greatness of God as manifested in His saints.*

The *Gospel* takes us to Mount Olivet, where we are privileged to sit at the feet of Jesus. He foretells the signs of His coming, namely, the messianic tribulations and woes. Among these are the sufferings of the martyrs: "They will put you to death; and all nations will hate you for My Name's sake." Exactly what befell the martyrs we honor today! The Mass in their honor is a "sign of the Lord's coming" in the glory of His saints. Holy Communion provides strength to "persevere unto the end." Christ speaks to us as His friends (*Comm.*), and inspires us to suffer courageously. Today's Mass was like an hour on Mount Tabor; we beheld Christ returning amid the splendor of His martyrs. Now we come down from the Mount of Transfiguration to continue life's Way of the Cross.

January 20

ST. FABIAN, Pope and Martyr
ST. SEBASTIAN, Martyr

A power went forth from him, and he healed all

We celebrate the feast of two martyrs whom the Church has always venerated very highly. Their names are in the Litany of the Saints. In the Middle Ages St. Sebastian especially was invoked for protection against the plague. The feast dates to ancient times, being found in the earliest sacramentaries.

1. **St. Fabian.** *Day of death*: January 20, 250. *Grave*: at Rome, in the catacomb of St. Callistus; his body was found in 1915. *Life*. Fabian was elevated to the papacy through miraculous intervention, and ruled the Church from 236 to 250. Shortly after his election, the assassination of Maximin put an end to the current persecution. The succeeding emperors did not bother to disturb the Christians, and the Church, under Pope Fabian's rule, took advantage of the calm interlude to further her external organization. To each of the seven deacons Fabian assigned a district of Rome, enjoining upon them the care of the poor. The seven subdeacons were given the task of gathering the Acts of the martyrs.

Later, under Decius, another savage persecution began, and Fabian became one of its first victims. He was buried in the catacomb of St. Callistus, where a commemorative burial stone was found a few decades ago. *Application*. Pope Fabian's two special interests were the poor and the liturgy. From him we will learn to unite liturgical living with noble-minded, practical charity, the *caritas Christi* showing itself in genuine brotherly love.

2. **St. Sebastian.** *Day of death*: January 20, about 280. *Grave*: at Rome, in the catacomb bearing his name, over which stands a magnificent basilica. *Picture*: as a young man bound to a tree, pierced with arrows. *Life*. The name of Sebastian is enveloped in a wreath of legends. The oldest historical account of the saint is found in a commentary on the psalms by St. Ambrose;

the passage reads: "Allow me to propose to you the example of the holy martyr Sebastian. By birth he was a Milanese. Perhaps the persecutor of Christians had left Milan, or had not yet arrived, or had become momentarily more tolerant. Sebastian believed that here there was no opportunity for combat, or that it had already passed. So he went to Rome, the scene of bitter opposition arising from the Christians' zeal for the faith. There he suffered, there he gained the crown."

St. Sebastian was widely venerated during the Middle Ages, particularly as a protector against the plague. Paul the Deacon relates that in 670 a great pestilence at Rome ceased when an altar was dedicated in his honor. The Breviary account of the saint is highly legendary; in part it reads: "Diocletian tried by every means to turn Sebastian from the faith of Christ. After all efforts had proven fruitless, he ordered him tied to a post and pierced with arrows. When everyone thought him dead, a devout woman named Irene arranged for his burial during the night; finding him still alive, she cared for him in her own house. After his recovery he appeared again before Diocletian and boldly rebuked him for his wickedness. Enraged by the saint's sharp words, the emperor ordered him scourged until he expired. His body was thrown into a sewer."

3. Holy Mass (Intret). When the Church celebrates the feast of a martyr, her heart swells with emotion; for martyrs are her dearest children. In them, as in no other, she becomes conformed to her divine Bridegroom; in them she can say most truly: "With Christ I am nailed to the Cross." Moreover, Mother Church has a strong preference for celebrating the holy Sacrifice at a martyr's grave. Consequently, to grasp the full meaning of the texts, we must travel in spirit to the tomb of the saint or saints being honored. The psalm chants, almost without exception, presuppose our presence there.

Consider, for example, what a profound impression today's *Introit* produces when prayed in the presence of the saint's body, still bearing the marks of martyrdom. Struck by the evidence of inhuman cruelty, the Church cries out in anguish for punish-

ment of the enemies. It would seem as if the horror and fury of a mass murder had wrung from the Church this plaintive cry. The *Epistle* likewise creates a much greater effect at the tomb, as the Church details the sufferings of the martyrs while pointing to the niches where they lie buried. "These also (today's martyrs)," she says, "were found approved by the testimony of faith." In the *Gradual* the Church sings the praise of God's majesty, which showed itself all-powerful in our saints. It was the Lord's mighty "right hand" that wrought such glorious deeds in them, and continues His prodigies of grace, *prodigia,* in us.

For a better appreciation of the *Gospel,* bear in mind that at the graves of the holy martyrs many miraculous cures took place, and that St. Sebastian in particular was from earliest times venerated as wonder-worker and protector against uncontrollable disease. It was also customary to bring the sick to church, and to place linens and clothing on the saint's grave; for the faithful were convinced that "a power went forth from it." That the liturgy puts a special value upon this phrase from the Gospel is evident from its use as the *Communion* verse. Here the words, moreover, can be given a twofold meaning; we may think of the miraculous power emanating from the saint's grave, or the power of Christ's Eucharistic Body. The Communion text, therefore, was remarkably well chosen. Or, better still, we might say that at the holy Sacrifice the power of grace residing in St. Sebastian is imparted to us because his power and grace is precisely that which Christ is bestowing upon us today.

January 21

ST. AGNES, Virgin and Martyr

To Him am I espoused, He alone has my troth

In St. Agnes, the heroic, virgin-bride of God, the Church sees herself. She therefore offers us an intimate view of the virgin-martyr's soul aglow with divine love. The Divine Office for her

feast is another canticle of canticles, a nuptial hymn of the Church to her heavenly Bridegroom. Our soul, too, is an image of the Church, and should become an "Agnes." How well our feast reflects the marriage motif of the Epiphany season.

1. **St. Agnes.** *Day of death*: January 21 (toward the close of the third century). *Grave*: in Rome, at the church named in her honor. *Picture*: as a young maiden with a martyr's crown and a lamb. *Life.* Agnes is one of the most glorious saints in the calendar of the Roman Church. The greatest Church Fathers vie with one another in sounding her praise and glory. St. Jerome writes: "All nations, especially their Christian communities, praise in word and writing the life of St. Agnes. She triumphed over her tender age as well as over the merciless tyrant. To the crown of spotless innocence she added the glory of martyrdom."

Our saint's name should be traced to the Greek *hagne* — the pure, rather than to the Latin *agna* — lamb. But the Latin derivation prevailed in the early Church. The reason may have been that eight days after her death Agnes appeared to her parents with a train of virgins, and a lamb at her side. St. Augustine knew both derivations. "Agnes," he writes, "means 'lamb' in Latin, but in Greek it denotes 'the pure one.' " The Latin interpretation occasioned the yearly blessing of the St. Agnes lambs; it takes place on this day in the Church of which she is patron, and the wool is used in weaving the palliums worn by archbishops and, through privilege, by some bishops. In the church built by the Emperor Constantine over the saint's grave, Pope Gregory the Great preached a number of homilies. Reliable details concerning the life of St. Agnes are very few. The oldest material occurs

in St. Ambrose's *De Virginibus,* parts of which are read today at Matins. The value of the later (definitely unauthentic) "Passion" of the saint is enhanced by the fact that various antiphons and responsories in the Office are derived from it.

From such liturgical sources we may construct the following "life of St. Agnes." One day when Agnes, then thirteen years old, was returning home from school, she happened to meet Symphronius, a son of the city prefect. At once he became passionately attracted to her and tried to win her by precious gifts. Agnes repelled him, saying: "Away from me, food of death, for I have already found another lover" (*first antiphon, first nocturn*). "With His ring my Lord Jesus Christ has betrothed me, and He has adorned me with the bridal crown" (*3. Ant., Lauds*). "My right hand and my neck He has encircled with precious stones, and has given me earrings with priceless pearls; He has decked me with lovely, glittering gems" (*2. Resp.*). "The Lord has clothed me with a robe of gold, He has adorned me with priceless jewels" (*4. Resp.*). "Honey and milk have I received from His mouth, and His blood has reddened my cheeks (*5. Resp.*).[1] "I love Christ, into whose chamber I shall enter, whose Mother is a virgin, whose Father knows not woman, whose music and melody are sweet to my ears. When I love Him, I remain chaste; when I touch Him, I remain pure; when I possess Him, I remain virgin. Already His body is united with mine, and His blood has reddened my cheeks. I am betrothed to Him whom the angels serve, whose beauty the sun and moon admire. For Him alone I keep my troth, to Him I surrender with all my heart" (*3., 6., 7. Resps.*).

Incensed by her rebuff, Symphronius denounced Agnes to his father, the city prefect. When he threatened her with commitment to a house of ill fame, Agnes replied: "At my side I have a protector of my body, an angel of the Lord (*2. Ant., Lauds*). "When Agnes entered the house of shame, she found an angel

[1] This alludes to the holy Eucharist. The newly-baptized were given milk and honey after receiving Communion, and Christians in general used to moisten their brow and cheeks with the Precious Blood.

of the Lord ready to protect her" (*1. Ant., Lauds*). A light enveloped her and blinded all who tried to approach. Then another judge condemned her to the stake because the pagan priests accused her of sorcery.

Surrounded by flames she prayed with outstretched arms: "I beseech You, Father almighty, most worthy of awe and adoration. Through Your most holy Son I escaped the threats of the impious tyrant and passed through Satan's filth with feet unsullied. Behold, I now come to You, whom I have loved, whom I have sought, whom I have always desired." She gave thanks as follows: "O You, the almighty One, who must be adored, worshipped, feared — I praise You because through Your only-begotten Son I have escaped the threats of wicked men and have walked through the filth of sin with feet unsullied. I extol You with my lips, and I desire You with all my heart and strength."

After the flames died out, she continued: "I praise You, Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, because by Your Son the fire around me was extinguished" (*4. Ant., Lauds*). And now she longed for union with Christ: "Behold, what I yearned for, I already see; what I hoped for, I already hold in embrace; with Him I am united in heaven whom on earth I loved with all my heart." Her wish was granted; the judge ordered her beheaded.

2. Divine Office. We suggest that the reader devote special attention to the antiphons and responsories, for these reflect the spirit of ancient Christian piety. Noteworthy too is St. Ambrose's celebrated homily on St. Agnes, read in the second nocturn. "Today is the birthday of a virgin; let us imitate her virginal innocence. It is the birthday of a martyr; let us also bring sacrifice. It is the birthday of St. Agnes; let men look up in admiration and children not be disheartened. You married, be filled with wonder; you unmarried, follow in her footsteps. But where shall we find words of adequate praise, since her very name bespeaks her glory and renown? In her we see a devotion that far surpasses her age, a virtue that exceeds all power of nature. Hence, it seems to me that she had not merely a human name, but, prophetically, she was given the name of a martyr, to indi-

cate beforehand what she was to be. The name of our virgin is a guarantee of her purity. If I call her martyr, already I have praised enough. For, that is great praise, indeed, which one does not need to seek but is freely given by others. No one can be more praised than one who is praised by all. As many men, so many encomiums. They have only to mention her name to praise her as a martyr.

"According to tradition, it was in her thirteenth year that she suffered martyrdom. How despicable the cruelty that spared not even this tender age! But how great the power of faith that found even that age its witness! In her tender body, was there room for wounds? She had scarcely a place for the iron of death to strike, yet had the courage to overcome all tortures. Before the blood-reeking hands of the executioners she stands unafraid, and is not even shaken by the fear-inspiring clang of heavy iron chains. She is prepared to offer her whole body to the murderous sword of the savage executioner.

"When still too young to know what death is, against her will she is dragged to the altars of pagan gods. In the midst of flames she stretches out her arms toward Christ. And in the temple of idolatrous sacrifice she does not hesitate to sign herself with the victorious sign of the Lord. She is ready to deliver her hands and neck to shackles of iron, yet no chains could enclose such delicate members. A new kind of martyrdom! A virgin still immature for torture, yet mature for triumph; unsuited for combat, yet become worthy of the crown of victory. She was a teacher of virtue, despite her youth. No bride ever hastens to the nuptial chamber with such joy and alacrity as Agnes hastened to the place of execution. All weep, but she sheds not a tear. All marvel that one who had hardly tasted life should surrender it so lightly, as though already wearied by it. And all wonder how one still too young to rule her own life should prove a witness for God.

"What a dreadful manner the executioner assumed that he might inspire her with dread. How he used flattery and coaxing to lead her to apostasy. And how many there were who wished

to bring her home as bride. But she declared: It is an injustice against the Bridegroom to keep Him waiting for His chosen one. He that first chose me for Himself shall have me. Executioner, why delay you? Let this body perish, which only pleases eyes that please me not. Standing there, she prayed, then bent her neck to the executioner. You could see him tremble, as though he were the condemned. His right hand faltered, his face paled with fear of another's peril. But the young maiden did not fear. Thus, in one immolation you witness two martyrdoms: one for virginity, and one for the faith. A virgin she remained, and the martyr's crown obtained."

3. Holy Mass (Me exspectaverunt). The Office of the feast approaches poetry, its tone is highly lyrical. By way of contrast, the Mass formulary shows restraint and classic reticence. A beautiful bridal Mass, it was first proper to the feast of St. Agnes but later served as model for the Common of Virgins. The parable of the Wise Virgins is its dominant feature (*All.*, *Gosp.*, *Comm.*). Closely linked with the parable is Psalm 44, the Church's nuptial song, (*Grad.*, *Off.*, *Comm.* in its original unabridged version). Today, Agnes exemplifies Christ's Bride, the Church. At the *Introit* we join our saint as she forsakes the hostile world plotting her ruin; for we are determined to walk the "blessed way of the undefiled" in her company.

At the *Offertory* we see the Church, the virgin-bride, uniting her sacrifice with Christ's redemptive sacrifice; she is accompanied by a multitude clothed in white, with Agnes leading. (The old versions do not read *afferentur* but *offerentur*, which implies an offering). The *Communion* verse repeats the leitmotif: "Behold, the Bridegroom comes; go forth to meet Him." Remember that these words were sung at night in the darkness of the catacomb where the saint lay buried. Imagine the impression they must have made when the hope of Christ's early return was still cherished in men's hearts. *Postcommunion*: Now that we have been nourished by a heavenly Food and Drink, we humbly implore You, our God, for protection through the prayers of her in whose memory we have received It. Amen.

January 22

STS. VINCENT AND ANASTASIUS, Martyrs

Be deacons, serving Christ's body

1. St. Vincent. *Day of death*: January 22, 304 (?). *Grave*: at Castres, Aquitaine, in the church over his remains. *Picture*:as a deacon with a raven (which guarded his corpse). *Life*. Vincent of Saragossa was one of the Church's three most illustrious deacons, the other two being Stephen and Lawrence. He is also Spain's most renowned martyr. Ordained deacon by Bishop Valerius of Saragossa, he was taken in chains to Valencia during the Diocletian persecution and put to death. From legend we have the following details of his martyrdom. After brutal scourging in the presence of many witnesses, he was stretched on the rack; but neither torture nor blandishments nor threats could undermine the strength and courage of his faith. Next, he was cast on a heated grating, lacerated with iron hooks, and seared with hot metal plates. Then he was returned to prison, where the floor was heavily strewn with pieces of broken glass. A heavenly brightness flooded the entire dungeon, filling all who saw it with greatest awe.

After this he was placed on a soft bed in the hope that lenient treatment would induce apostasy, since torture had proven ineffective. But strengthened by faith in Christ Jesus and the hope of everlasting life, Vincent maintained an invincible spirit and overcame all efforts, whether by fire, sword, rack, or torture to induce defection. He persevered to the end and gained the heavenly crown of martyrdom.

2. St. Anastasius. *Day of death*: January 22, 628. *Grave*: in Rome at the Salvian Baths (where his head is kept). *Picture*: as a monk with an ax (the instrument of his death). *Life*. The Martyrology relates: "Anastasius, a Persian monk, suffered many tortures while bound and imprisoned at Caesarea in Palestine. Afterwards, Chosroës, king of Persia, subjected him to further cruelties, and then ordered him beheaded. Seventy Chris-

tian companions preceded him in martyrdom, put to death by drowning. Later, his head was brought to Rome, as also a picture that was being widely venerated; at the sight of that picture the demons fled and the sick found healing. These effects are attested in the Acts of the Second Council of Nicea."

The saint was venerated highly in Rome. *Application.* The Church has always accorded great honor to the relics and pictures of her saints. Rather than divert us away from Christ, such veneration serves as a way to Him because we regard the saints as His glorified members. And the presence of their ikons puts Satan to flight.

3. Holy Mass (Intret). The *Introit* is the same as that we had two days ago on the feast of Sts. Fabian and Sebastian. If we keep St. Vincent in mind, we will have a better understanding of this opening chant. The natural man rebels against the tortures inflicted on the martyrs. The tone of the *Epistle* is more consoling: "The souls of the just are in the hand of God. In the sight of fools they seem to die, but they are in peace (sharing Christ's glory). God only tried them and found them worthy of Himself. . . . He received them as victims of sacrifice; now they shine and sit as rulers, and the Lord is their King forever." Surely the Church has a genius for showing martyrdom in a strikingly beautiful light, and for inspiring us with the courage and desire to suffer.

In the *Gospel* Christ Himself reveals the signs heralding His Second Coming. Among them is martyrdom: "They will lay hands on you, persecute you, and drag you before kings and governors for My Name's sake. You will be hated by all." In our saint these words were fulfilled to the letter. We, too, should give some evidence of their heroic spirit; at least we could welcome a bloodless martyrdom, "By your patience you will win your souls." Holy Communion gives us renewed strength and courage to make a complete offering, a "holocaust" of our lives.

4. The Diaconate of Holy Church. Today's feast turns our thoughts to the Church's diaconate. The word *deacon* means *servant.* The foremost deacon is Christ Himself, who said: "The

Son of Man has not come to be served but *to serve,* and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). Considered as an ecclesiastical order and office, the diaconate was instituted by the apostles. Little by little its function grew in importance. It is the first of the Holy Orders, and imprints the sacramental character. The liturgy indicates this effect by permitting deacons to address the people with *Dominus vobiscum* (The Lord be with you), and receive the respond, *Et cum spiritu tuo* (And with your spirit), i.e., with the Holy Spirit, conferred on you at ordination.

In the primitive Church the deacon had three principal tasks: (a) the care of the poor; (b) the preaching of the gospel; and (c) the dispensing of the Eucharist. Briefly, his duty was *to serve the body of Christ,* both the Mystical Body (in the poor) and the Eucharistic Body (in the Gospel and holy Communion). In the Western Church deacons no longer regularly discharge these functions. Every priest, however, should remember that he is also a deacon, charged with the faithful performance of caring for the poor, preaching the Gospel, and administering the holy Eucharist.

In their own way the laity, too, can be deacons. As there is a universal lay priesthood shared by all the faithful, so one may speak of a universal diaconate. The laity can serve the body of Christ in a threefold way that is comparable to the official functions of the deacon. Like the latter, they should render the poor every possible care and service (formerly there were deaconesses too for this very purpose). And though the laity are not authorized to preach, they should read the book of the Gospels (the old mosaics depict deacons as carrying the Gospel). Fathers and mothers must help spread the knowledge of the Gospel by reading and explaining it to their children, and by fostering love of the Bible and other spiritual books. This is one way for them to be deacons.

As lay persons they can also "serve the altar." Of course, they may not, as formerly, bring the holy Eucharist to the sick, a function now reserved to priests. Still, there are ways in which the laity may serve the Eucharistic as well as the Mystical Christ.

They can clean the church, wash the altar linens, supply and keep in good condition the priestly vestments, and, in general, be concerned about the proper decoration of the altar. They may also teach the use of the Missal and serve the priest at the altar.[1] Another excellent way of acting as a deacon is to promote the liturgical revival. But whatever the particular undertaking or opportunity, there do exist and will continue to exist until the end of time deacons, servants to the body of Christ.

January 23

ST. RAYMUND OF PENNAFORT, Confessor
ST. EMERENTIANA, Virgin and Martyr

Produce fruit worthy of repentance

1. St. Raymund. *Day of death*: January 6, 1275. *Grave*: in Barcelona; his feast was added to the Roman calendar in 1671. *Life*. Raymund was a noted canonist; he rendered great service to the Church through his redaction and codification of Pope Gregory the IX's Decretals, a collection of juridical documents. At the age of forty-five, he entered the Dominican Order. He assisted in founding the Order of Our Lady of Mercy for the ransom of captives, by drawing up a rule. He also had the gift of miracles, the most remarkable of which occurred on a return from the Balearic Isles to Barcelona. On that occasion he stretched his cloak on the sea and sailed the distance of 160 miles in six hours; arriving at his monastery, he entered through closed doors. He died in 1275, almost one hundred years old. Raymund was an excellent confessor, for which reason he is honored as the patron saint of those who hear confessions.

[1] This is no censure upon the practice of having young boys serve Mass. Nevertheless, it is not easy to understand why this sacred duty was relegated so completely to children. Once upon a time it was entrusted only to such as had received the first of the Minor Orders. Why shouldn't laymen serve at the altar on Sundays and greater feasts?

2. St. Emerentiana. *Day of death*: January 23, in the third century. *Grave*: in Rome, at the church of St. Agnes. In 1605 her remains were canonically examined and authenticated. *Life.* Emerentiana was a Roman virgin, the foster sister of St. Agnes. Already as a catechumen she was conspicuous for her faith and love of Christ. One day she boldly upbraided the idolators for their violent attacks on the Christians. The enraged mob retaliated by pelting her with stones. She died in the Lord praying at the tomb of St. Agnes, baptized in her own blood. *Application.* St. Emerentiana is an example of one baptized in blood. Before being sacramentally washed, she died for the faith, and her martyrdom supplied for the sacrament. How ardently she desired baptism in Christ! Foster a meaningful appreciation of the first sacrament you received.

3. Holy Mass (Os justi). This formulary, the first in the Common of Confessors, set the norm for this class of saints. The dominant theme is contained in the Gospel parable; the watchful servant "with loins girt and burning lamp in hand, awaits the Lord's return." How well that little sentence sums up the life of our saint. All through the night of his long earthly life, Raymund stood ready for his final journey, with the lamp of love burning brightly. Since his whole life was one of expectant waiting for the Lord's coming, when his Master "knocked" in death, he "opened to Him" instantly. "The Lord found him watching" and took him to heaven to be seated at the celestial table. And Christ Himself served him.

The *Gospel* message applies to us as well as to the saint. At Mass and holy Communion it is fulfilled in a mystical manner. The Lord knocks; we open to Him, and He invites us to the marriage feast — *transiens ministrabit* — passing by, He serves us. This phrase is the best description of the Eucharist. Christ passes by; the Eucharist is not heaven's "eternal enjoyment of His divinity." Our task consists in being "watchful" like St. Raymund, having our loins girt and our lamps burning. Thus prepared, we are already numbered among those whom the Lord places over all His goods (*Comm.*). Note again how the *Com-*

munion antiphon gains in effect when sung at the moment of receiving holy Communion, "when the Lord comes."

4. The Collect. Surely you have often observed how skillful the liturgy is in adapting the life of a saint to our modern needs and conduct. Today's Collect, composed by Pope Clement VIII, is a good example. As is well known, most Collects consist of three parts, the invocation; the historical or doctrinal link with the feast or season; the petition, based on the doctrinal or historical statement. In today's Collect the historical link is supplied by two circumstances from the saint's life, viz., his role as an ideal confessor and his journey upon the sea. These supply the basis for the two petitions that follow: (a) that we "may bring forth worthy fruits of repentance"; and (b) that we may reach the harbor of eternal salvation.

As patron of confessors, St. Raymund can obtain for us the grace to make better use of the sacrament of penance. What tremendous possibilities for spiritual growth this sacrament contains! How grateful we should be that divine Providence has provided another means of salvation, should we perchance lose or endanger the life of grace after baptism. The Collect uses the Baptist's words: "Bring forth worthy fruits of repentance (conversion)." In context the Gospel compares the process of conversion to a growing tree — its value depends upon its fruits. Too often, is it not true, our repentance goes by fits and starts, with no continuity. This is not the way to bear "worthy fruits." On the day after tomorrow (January 25) the Church will show us a magnificent example, how St. Paul brought forth "worthy fruits of conversion."

The Collect's second petition is clothed in a symbol which the liturgy employs frequently. Life is compared to a voyage over billowing seas. There are storms, dangers. It is important to keep the compass of life steadily pointed to a definite destination. Our plea is for a safe arrival at the eternal harbor despite all storms and swells. That both petitions of our Collect be realized, may the Eucharist provide the required grace and strength.

January 24

ST. TIMOTHY, Bishop and Martyr

Keep the commandments till the Lord returns

Ordinarily the Church celebrates the feast of a saint on the day he died. When the date is unknown, she assigns the celebration to a time of her own choosing, often with reference to the liturgical season or another related feast. Today we have an example of the latter, i.e., an instance of a feast placed near or next to one with which it has a special bearing. For tomorrow we will commemorate the conversion of St. Paul. Timothy was St. Paul's closest disciple and his constant companion during most of his missionary career.

1. St. Timothy. *Grave*: in Constantinople, at the Church of the Apostles. Although the Greek Church had long honored him as an "apostle," his feast came into the Roman calendar only under Pope Clement VIII (died 1644.) *Life*. Timothy was Paul's dearest disciple, his most steadfast associate. He was converted during the apostle's first missionary journey. When Paul revisited Lystra, Timothy, though still very young (about twenty) joined him as a co-worker and companion. Thereafter, there existed between them a most intimate bond, as between father and son. St. Paul calls him his beloved child, devoted to him "like a son to his father" (Phil. 2:22). Of a kindly disposition, unselfish, prudent, zealous, he was a great consolation to Paul, particularly in the sufferings of his later years. He also assisted the apostle in the establishment of all the major Christian communities and was entrusted with missions of highest importance. Timothy was with Paul during his first Roman imprisonment. Paul made his self-sacrificing companion bishop of Ephesus, but the finest monument left him by his master are the two canonical Epistles bearing his name.

2. Holy Mass (Statuit). Excepting the Epistle, the Mass is from the Common of a Martyr Bishop. The *chants* extol our saint, who as a bishop images the divine High Priest and appears

to us in the officiating priest. The *Gospel* describes the steep paths that must be climbed by those who follow Christ: "Father and mother . . . and even his own life he must hate" — Christ must be preferred before and above all else. "Whoever does not carry his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple." The cross always means insult, contempt, shame. It is by contempt of the world and hatred of self that we build God's kingdom in the soul and become equipped to meet and conquer the devil. See, the Church is telling us how we may be martyrs even without actually shedding our blood.

3. The Legacy of St. Paul. No one understood the heart of St. Paul better than Timothy, no one was more sympathetic. And Paul reciprocated his disciple's affection. His finest legacy is the two epistles he wrote to Timothy, and we may be sure his disciple kept them as a precious heirloom. His master's precepts and admonitions must surely have made a lasting impression, and who will doubt that he modeled his life upon them? Today would be a most opportune occasion to study these epistles and to apply personally the high ideals proposed. Yet, how many, one wonders, will take the time! Therefore Mother Church culls out a brief passage as the Epistle and hopes that we will take it seriously during the hours still remaining to St. Timothy's feast. Feel yourself as Paul's favorite son as you read the words. He speaks to you. What does he say? Give your best efforts to the practice of virtue — justice, godliness, faith, love, patience, mildness. Fight the good fight of faith; with both hands hold eternal life tight.

Then St. Paul speaks of the two great moments in a Christian's life, the beginning and the end of our earthly pilgrimage, baptism and death. At baptism we made "the confession of faith before many witnesses," i.e., before the assembled Church. From then on we became "confessors" and "martyrs" (witnesses) to the same faith by daily practice. Every Credo of the Mass should remind us of our solemn baptismal confession and promise. Paul cites the example of the King of all confessors and martyrs, Jesus Christ, who made a glorious confession before Pilate; and the

Church points now to Timothy, who was faithful to the "admonition" of his master and sealed "his good confession" with his blood.

At this point there is an easy transition to the other great landmark in life, Christ's coming at death. To be prepared for this event must be our chiefest concern; we must make every effort to remain "spotless and blameless." The Eucharist is the link between these supreme moments, baptism and death. It sustains and intensifies our baptismal life, giving grace and strength for the daily "confession"; and it presses us onward to the Lord's coming, a mystery it anticipates sacramentally in the present.

January 25

THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL

I go to Mass a Saul, I come fom Mass a Paul

Originally today's feast did not commemorate the apostle's conversion but rather the translation of his relics; and it was chronologically associated with the feast of St. Peter's Chair at Rome occurring just eight days earlier. Gradually, however, the original purpose was forgotten, and what had been a feast honoring the apostle's relics became the commemoration of his conversion.

1. **The Conversion of St. Paul.** With festal liturgy the Church commemorates Paul's conversion because of its supreme importance to Christianity. The conversion took place about five years after our Lord's death (the Martyrology says two years). It was a sudden occurrence, not of the apostle's seeking but due wholly to divine intervention. St. Paul refers to it frequently in his epistles, always with the profoundest emotion and gratitude. The Acts of the Apostles gives a detailed account of the event, not once but three times: 9:1–22; 22:3–21; 26:9–18.

Paul's conversion, to repeat, was a most decisive moment in the development of God's kingdom on earth. Thanks to his uncompromising spirit the Church shook off the bonds of Judaism and spread to the Gentiles. Paul it was who brought the faith of Christ to Europe and, yes, to Rome. Through him the Church became what it is by nature — universal, catholic. Accordingly, we, too, are indebted to him. With sentiments of deepest gratitude we celebrate that memorable event when grace scored so clean a victory over nature and human will. Indeed, we could call today's mystery a feast in honor of "Grace Triumphant."

Still, the apostle's will was not slighted; rather, grace was wedded to will. As he himself said later: "God's grace in me has not been fruitless" (1 Cor. 15:10).

2. Holy Mass (Scio cui). In the *Introit* St. Paul places himself entirely in God's hands and in return looks forward hopefully to the good things reserved for him on the day of Christ's return. But the same words are also an expression of our hope, and holy Communion guarantees the blessings promised. Psalm 138 (which we ought to pray in its entirety) kindles the joyful realization that like St. Paul we were chosen from all eternity. May our call result in a conversion that brings us likewise to God (*Coll.*). The *Epistle* is a vivid description of the feast's mystery. In the *Gospel* we hear our Lord's promise to those that follow Him: "When the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also will sit on twelve thrones. . . ." For St. Paul this promise was fulfilled at his death; and our participation in the Mass means a sharing in his glory. The Eucharistic banquet is the pledge of the "hundredfold reward" reserved for those who have renounced all and have followed Christ (*Comm.*).

3. Conversion. St. Paul's soul-shaking experience on the road to Damascus is not without a parallel in our life. Our first conversion was in baptism, when Christ came to dwell in us. It was a day of pure grace, without the least merit on our part. We were, it is true, unaware of the gift received — which from some viewpoints is regrettable. In the primitive Church adult baptism was common and the impression made was most profound. For the

recipients it meant a real *conversio,* a complete reversal of their manner of life. Think, for example, of St. Augustine.

Most of us, on the other hand, were baptized as infants. Now we find that in addition to our first conversion, we must undergo another. If we are lukewarm or sinful Christians, or if, as so often happens, we are Christians merely from habit or routine — unconscious Christians, as it were — then we must be reconverted to a life that is earnestly, consciously, zealously Christian. How important then to make the meaning of baptism constantly effective! Today's feast should be dedicated to this purpose. Our celebration should include gratitude to God for that first conversion we do not remember and for the return to Him we do remember.

I know of another "Damascus hour" in my life, holy Mass. Here, too, Christ meets me. Here, grace is added to the grace of my first conversion to perfect what was there begun and to maintain in me the same unfailing consciousness of conversion that we admire in St. Paul. Twenty, thirty years later he was still moved to tears whenever his thoughts turned to that unforgettable moment on the way to Damascus. He, indeed, is a great man in whom the memory of a momentous experience never fades. For the mere act of conversion is not enough. Conversion must be lasting, and our "Damascus hour" at Mass helps make it so. Every Mass effects a *conversio,* a change in me. I bring my human wants and weaknesses to the altar, and in exchange receive divine life and strength. I bring human bread (at the Offertory) and receive divine Bread (in holy Communion). *I go to Mass a Saul, I come from Mass a Paul.*

January 26

ST. POLYCARP, Bishop and Martyr

Be brave, Polycarp, conduct yourself manfully

1. St. Polycarp. *Day of death*: February 23, 155. *Grave*: at the church over his relics on Mount Mustapha in Asia Minor. *Life*. Among the select few from apostolic times about whom we have some historical information is Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna and one of the most glorious martyrs of Christian antiquity. His life and death are attested by the authentic "Acts" of his martyrdom (no similar account is older), as well as by other contemporary writings. It moves us deeply when, for example, we find in St. Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp, the passage in which he reminisces:

"The memory of that time when as a youth I was with Polycarp in Asia Minor is as fresh in my mind as the present. Even now I could point to the place where he sat and taught, and describe his coming and going, his every action, his outward appearance, and his manner of discourse to the people. It seems as though I still heard him tell of his association with the apostle John and with others who saw the Lord, and as though he were still relating to me their words and what he heard from them about the Lord and His miracles. . . ."

On the day of his death (February 23) the Martyrology recounts with deep reverence:

"At Smyrna, the death of St. Polycarp. He was a disciple of the holy apostle John, who consecrated him bishop of that city; and there he acted as the primate of all Asia Minor. Later, under Marcus Antoninus and Lucius Aurelius Commodus, he was brought before the tribunal of the proconsul; and when all the people in the amphitheater cried out against him, he was handed over to be burned to death. But since the fire caused him no harm, he was put to death by the sword. Thus he gained the crown of martyrdom. With him, twelve other Christians, who came from Philadelphia, met death by martyrdom in the same city."

2. Holy Mass (Sacerdotes Dei). The formulary (mostly borrowed from Masses of the Common) was molded with an eye on the saint's life. The venerable bishop stands before us in the person of the officiating priest (*Intr., All.*). In the *Epistle* the apostle John, our saint's teacher, instructs us on the nature of love: "In this we have come to know God's love, that He laid down His life for us. So we too must lay down our life for the brethren." This, precisely, is what Polycarp did; and the Mass at which we are assisting is a wondrous renewal of both deaths, of Christ's and our holy martyr's. Polycarp was also a living fulfillment of the *Gospel*. He proclaimed the faith and "confessed the Lord before men"; now "the Lord confesses him before His heavenly Father." In holy Communion we receive a ray of that glory our saint now enjoys in fullest splendor.

3. From the Acts of St. Polycarp. If you have access to a copy of the "Acts" of our saint, try to glance through it today. You will quickly sense the pure and noble spirit of the sub-apostolic Church. A few excerpts:

On a certain day the police, together with a young slave (turned informer) and a detachment of cavalry bearing their usual arms, rode forth as though in pursuit of a robber. At a late hour they arrived and found Polycarp resting in a small, upper-story room. Though he could have fled, he preferred to stay, saying: God's will be done. Hearing that the pursuers had arrived, he came down and began to talk with them. They marveled at his age and peace of soul, and wondered why it was so urgent to arrest such an old man. He, on the other hand, immediately ordered food and drink to be given them, as much as they desired; while for himself he asked an hour to pray undisturbed. They agreed. So he went in and, moved by God's grace, prayed with such fervor that it was two hours before he could bring himself to stop. The bystanders were amazed, and some regretted having come to arrest a man who obviously lived in the deepest intimacy with God.

As Polycarp entered the arena, he was privileged to hear a voice from heaven saying, "Be brave, Polycarp, conduct your-

self manfully." No one saw the speaker, but those of our people who were present heard the voice. And while he was being led to the proconsul, a great cry went up from the spectators when they saw that Polycarp had been arrested. Then the proconsul asked him if he was Polycarp. When he said yes, the proconsul tried to persuade him to deny Christ, saying: "Have regard for your age," and other such coaxing and promising remarks as are usually made: "Swear by the god of Caesar; change your mind and say: Away with the godless!" Then Polycarp, his face grave, surveyed the whole multitude of godless pagans in the amphitheater and shook his fist at them; and looking up to heaven he groaned and said: "Away with the godless!" The proconsul continued to urge him, saying: "Take the oath and I will release you; curse Christ." But Polycarp answered: "Eighty-six years have I served Him, and He has never done me harm. How could I now revile my King and Savior?"

Putting his hands behind his back he allowed himself to be bound like a ram chosen for sacrifice, a holocaust prepared and pleasing to God. Then he raised his eyes to heaven and prayed: "Lord, almighty God, Father of Your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have received the knowledge of You; God of the angels and the powers, of the whole creation, and of all the just who live in Your sight! I am grateful to You for having made me worthy of this day and hour and permitting me to share the chalice of the martyrs. Today may I be numbered among them and be received in Your presence as acceptable sacrifice, even as You, the infallible and true God, have prepared me, and informed me, and have brought it to pass. Therefore, I praise and bless and glorify You for all Your goodness, through the eternal and heavenly High Priest Jesus Christ, Your beloved Son, through whom be glory to You with Him and the Holy Spirit, now and forevermore. Amen."

After he had spoken the *Amen* and finished his prayer, the men in charge of the fire lit it. And when a great flame broke out, we saw a miracle, those of us to whom the sight of it was granted. The fire took the form of an arch, like the full sail of a

ship and encircled the martyr's body which remained in the center like a loaf of bread while baking, or like gold and silver being refined in a furnace. And we perceived a pleasant odor, like the scent of burning incense, or the aroma of costly spices. When, at last, the godless men saw that the fire could not consume his body, they commanded the executioner to go up and plunge a dagger into his chest. As he did this, there was such a profusion of blood that it quenched the fire; and the whole mass of spectators marveled that there should be so great a difference between unbelievers and the elect.

January 27

ST. JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, Bishop and Doctor

I bear the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ in my body

1. St. John Chrysostom. *Day of death*: in exile, September 14, 407 (his body was brought to Constantinople on January 27). *Grave*: at first in Constantinople; later his body was taken to Rome and placed in St. Peter's. *Life*. On September 14 the Martyrology of the Church tells us: "At Constantinople, the death of St. John, bishop of that city. Because of the golden flow of his eloquence, he was surnamed Chrysostom (golden-mouthed). Through the intrigues of a hostile party, he was sent into exile; but when Pope Innocent I ruled in his favor, it became necessary to permit his return. However, during the return journey he suffered such great mistreatment from the soldiers in charge that he died on the way."

Today we go to Rome as pilgrims and visit the grave of a great bishop. Words can hardly describe his importance. He is a doctor of the Church, a bishop, a martyr. Now he stands "in the midst of the Church," and the Lord still "opens his mouth," for the influence of his writing continues. He was a divinely gifted preacher, perhaps the greatest in history; Pope Pius X officially

pronounced him the patron of preachers. So ardent was his love of St. Paul and so profound the analysis of his writings, it seemed the apostle himself was assisting him when he wrote. Because of their sober, realistic approach, Chrysostom's commentaries on Sacred Scripture are much easier to follow than the allegorical sallies of many patristic writers.

Chrysostom's written works are very numerous. There are treatises on the monastic life, on virginity, on the priesthood, as well as sermons and running commentaries (homilies) on various books of Holy Writ. He was also an eminent shepherd of souls, a protector of widows and orphans, a courageous bishop who "reproved both in season and out of season," who did not fear the displeasure of princes, or even of the Empress. His fidelity to pastoral duty made him a martyr. Twice he was forced into exile; and though the Church does not honor him as a martyr in the strict sense, he nevertheless bears the palm of martyrdom, since actually he was harried to death. Nor ought we neglect mentioning his great influence on the Eastern Church's liturgy; to this very day the rite most commonly used in the Greek Church is called "The Divine Liturgy of our holy Father John Chrysostom."

A native of Antioch, John received baptism at the age of twenty (about 368). After his ordination in 386, the bishop assigned him the office of preacher in the principal church of Antioch, a position he held for twelve years. In 397, against his will, he was made patriarch of Constantinople; but only by a ruse was he persuaded to assume that new dignity (he was abducted to Constantinople). His pastoral labors met with great success. Nevertheless, there was opposition, and the Empress Eudoxia's intrigues twice forced him into exile.

2. His Last Days. Bishop Palladius of Helenopolis, his friend and contemporary, gives us the following account of Chrysostom's return from exile.

"The soldiers of the imperial bodyguard led him away and forced him to proceed at a rapid pace, alleging that such were their orders. Doubtlessly they had been promised promotion if

they would cause their victim to die from exhaustion. Secretly, it is true, one of the guards began to moderate his professional cruelty in favor of a more kindly treatment toward the prisoner, but the other one only became more hard-hearted. Endeavoring to realize his wish to have John die on the way, he regarded it as an affront when persons approached and pleaded with him to show more consideration toward the saint. Even when rain pelted and drenched his prisoner, that brute drove him mercilessly on, and was still less concerned when the noonday sun beat down on his bald head, though he knew what pain it was causing. Nor was there ever any halt in cities and towns that offered facilities for a refreshing bath.

"Nevertheless, throughout the painful journey of three months, the saint maintained a noble equanimity, however much his body, like an apple on the topmost branch of a tree, was exposed to the sun's burning rays. They passed through the city of Komana without stopping, as though it had been a bridge. Not until about five or six miles beyond its walls, at the shrine of a martyr, did they pause. Here, in the night, there appeared to the saintly bishop St. Basilicus, who himself, as bishop of Komana, was martyred at Nicomedia in Bythinia under Emperor Maximin. Basilicus was accompanied by the martyr Lucian of Antioch. 'Have courage, my brother John,' Basilicus said, 'tomorrow we will be united with each other.' Shortly after, the same martyr, it is reported, appeared to a priest in the vicinity and bade him: 'Prepare a place for brother John; he is coming tomorrow.'

"On the following morning Chrysostom requested the soldiers not to proceed until the fifth hour, but they compelled him to continue the trek. Thirty furlongs had not been covered when, seeing that the saint had fallen critically ill, they found it necessary to turn back. At the shrine he asked for white garments — which indeed accorded well with his saintly life. His own clothes he gave to bystanders, keeping only his shoes. After receiving the holy Mysteries he prayed his last prayer, ending it with his usual formula: God be praised. Whereupon he entered into

eternal repose, he who all his life had endured great fatigue, not only to keep penitents on the way of salvation, but also by his earnest admonitions to bring back sinners from the way of perdition."

The Mass (*In medio*) is from the Common of Doctors. For explanation, see p. 383.

January 28

ST. PETER NOLASCO, Confessor
ST. AGNES (the second time), Virgin and Martyr

The Lord has sent redemption to His people

When in 1937 the feast of the newly-canonized St. John Bosco was assigned to January 31, the feast of St. Peter Nolasco was transferred from the 31st to the 28th, and that of St. Agnes *secundo*, i.e., for the second time (octave day), was reduced to a commemoration.

1. **St. Peter.** *Day of death*: December 25, 1256. *Grave*: in Barcelona. *Picture*: wearing the white habit of his order, on his breast an escutcheon bearing the Aragonese coat of arms, around him Christians delivered from captivity. *Life.* One night while Peter Nolasco was praying, the Blessed Virgin appeared (1228) and told him how greatly pleased she and her divine Son would be if a religious order were established in her honor for the express purpose of delivering Christians held in bondage by the infidels. In compliance with her wish, Peter, together with St. Raymund of Pennafort and James I, king of Aragon, founded the Order of Our Lady of Mercy for the ransom of captives. Besides the usual vows, all members were required to take a fourth, one by which they bound themselves to become captives of the pagans, if necessary, to effect the emancipation of Christians.

On one occasion Peter Nolasco ransomed 400 at Valencia and

Granada; twice he traveled to Africa as "the Ransomer," not without peril to his own life; and records show that through his personal efforts a total of 890 Christians regained their liberty. He died with these words from Psalm 110 on his lips: "The Lord has sent redemption to His people."

2. Holy Mass (Justus ut palma). The Mass mirrors Peter's life. He exchanged everything he had in order to obtain "the treasure which faileth not" (*Gosp.*). Truly his life was a spectacle unto men and angels (*Epist.*). At the *Offertory* we carry our saint's heroic spirit of renunciation to the altar, to which we add ours. Through the Eucharistic banquet we share in his glory. The whole formulary is imbued with the ideal of following Christ in poverty and suffering (*Epist.* and *Gosp.*). The *Epistle* makes us feel as though Peter Nolasco were chiding us for our proud spirit and luxury-loving tastes in the face of his example of sacrifice and humble reticence.

3. The Collect not only recapitulates the saint's life but also underscores its lesson for us. In it we find four points meriting special notes: (a) the saint's heroic charity, which impelled him to ransom Christians, was but the effusion of God's own love ("God so loved the world . . ."). It is indeed a special sign of divine predilection when He sends saints into the world who by their virtue reflect His own perfections.

b) Through the Order he founded, Mother Church obtained new children. Peter, therefore, is rightly called father. The notion of spiritual fatherhood is deeply rooted in the liturgy. St. Paul calls himself father in regard to the Corinthians: "Though you may have thousands of teachers in Christ, yet you do not have a multitude of fathers. For in Christ Jesus, through the gospel, I begot you." Consequently, there is good reason for a priest being called *Pater*, father, in the liturgy and by the faithful. Anyone, in fact, may share in the dignity of spiritual fatherhood by bringing new children into the Church through the apostolate.

c) The deliverance of Christian captives brings to mind our need for redemption from the bonds of Satan, from the "slavery of sin" (John 8:34). Baptism, indeed, freed us from the devil's

dominion (recall the many exorcisms in the baptismal rite). Nevertheless, on earth we continue to be bound by the invisible chains of evil inclinations and fondness for sin. (d) Only in our heavenly fatherland will we possess full freedom. How happy those Christian captives must have been to see their home and country again, to recover the freedom they so desperately desired. It has its lesson for us. Only in our heavenly homeland will we enjoy perfect, everlasting freedom. While on earth, however, we must constantly strive to acquire an increasing measure of the "freedom of the children of God" by overcoming our lower self. Spirit must rule supreme! "The truth will make you free."

4. St. Agnes (the second time). The early Christians would gather at a saint's grave for the holy Sacrifice, not only on the feast but also eight days later, the octave. Today's liturgy provides an example; only the liturgical books do not call the observance an "octave day" but *"Agnes secundo,"* i.e., the second time. A parallel may be found in the status accorded the three feasts following Christmas Day in the rubrical reform of some decades ago. According to the old sacramentaries today's observance enjoyed added significance by being St. Agnes' birthday, which, by way of exception, received liturgical attention in antiquity because of the saint's extraordinary veneration. In the Breviary today we find the following edifying Lesson.

"One night when the parents of St. Agnes were keeping vigil at their child's grave, as was their practice, she appeared with a choir of virgins and is said to have addressed them as follows: 'Do not mourn for me as one dead; for, like these virgins I live in heaven with Him whom on earth I loved with all my heart.' Some years later, Constantia, daughter of Constantine the Great, was suffering from an incurable ulcer; though not yet a Christian, she went to the saint's grave to pray, and falling asleep there, she heard in a dream these words from St. Agnes: 'Constantia (which means "steadfast one"), be steadfast. Believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He will heal you.' A cure actually did follow; and soon thereafter she, together with many mem-

bers of the imperial household, received baptism. In gratitude Constantia built the church over St. Agnes' grave."

The Reading furnishes certain insights into the piety of the early Christians. They loved to pass whole nights at the graves of their saints; and they would bring the sick along, an indication of great faith in the healing power emanating from the martyr's tomb.

"What I yearned for, I already see; what I hoped for, I already hold in embrace; with Him I am united in heaven whom on earth I loved with all my heart" (*Ben. Ant.* at Lauds).

January 29

ST. FRANCIS OF SALES, Bishop and Doctor

"A spoonful of honey will catch more flies than a hundred barrels of vinegar!"

(Words of St. Francis)

1. St. Francis. *Day of death*: December 28, 1622, at Lyons; January 29 marks the translation of his relics. *Grave*: church of the Visitation at Annecy (Savoy). The feast was added to the Roman calendar in 1666. *Life*. Francis was born on August 21, 1567, and ordained to the priesthood in 1593. From 1594 to 1598 he labored at the difficult and dangerous task of preaching to the Protestants of Chablais and effected the return of some 70,000 souls to the Catholic faith. In 1602 he became bishop of Genf. His zeal for souls is attested in 21,000 extant letters and 4,000 sermons which exemplify how he applied St. Paul's words: "I have become all things to all men." You may epitomize his character in two words, kindliness and lovableness — virtues that were the secret of his success. His writings reflect his kindheartedness and sweet disposition.

Most widely known is the saint's *Introduction to the Devout Life*, which, with the *Imitation of Christ*, is rightly considered

the finest outline of Christian perfection. Francis' *Introduction* proves to the world that true piety makes persons amiable, lovable and gay. A renowned and holy friendship existed between him and St. Frances de Chantal. In cooperation with her he founded the Visitation Nuns in 1610. Out of love for his own poor diocese, he refused opportunities for advancement, including the cardinalate. In recognition of the *Introduction* and his other writings, Francis has been declared a doctor of the Church.

How Francis developed a gentle and amiable disposition is a story in itself; he was not born a saint. By nature his temperament was choleric, fiery; little was needed to throw him into a state of violent anger. It took years before he mastered his impatience, his unruly temper. Even after he became bishop, there were slips, as for instance, when some one rang a bell before he had finished preaching. The important point, of course, is that by constant perseverance he did in time attain perfect self-mastery. Wherein lies a lesson.

2. Holy Mass (In medio). The Mass is from the Common of Doctors (*see* p. 383); only the *Oration,* composed by Alexander VII, is proper. It characterizes our saint as an illustrious shepherd of souls who made his own St. Paul's words: "I have become all things to all men that I might save many" (1 Cor. 9:22). There is an allusion to his gentleness of soul, *caritatis tuae dulcedine perfusi,* as we make our common petition: "Filled with the sweet power of Your love and abiding by his teaching, may we, through the help of his merits, attain everlasting joys." Whenever the day's saint is noted for a special virtue or grace (St. Francis of Sales is a good example), the whole day should come under its inspiration. The saint's heroic example should be made a focal point of attention not only at Mass and in the Divine Office, but at meditation too, and be incorporated into a practical, personal resolve. Thus the saint becomes our teacher.

At the *Offertory* we offer our readiness to imitate his chiefest virtue, and in holy Communion we receive grace and strength to put it into actual practice. At the Day Hours our petition and thoughts center around that virtue. Today, moreover, the chapter

we will read from the *Introduction to the Devout Life* will be that on meekness, mildness. Such practice will familiarize us with our saint, making him in fact and not merely in theory our teacher and model.

3. **Meekness and Mildness** according to the *Introduction to the Devout Life*. Life on earth is a pilgrimage to an eternal home in heaven. With our companions on the way we ought not be at enmity; rather we should walk together in peace and friendly accord, like brothers and neighbors. Anger should not flare up among us; there is never any excuse for allowing it to enter one's heart. As St. James says in his epistle: "Human anger does not bring about divine justification" (1:20). Granted, we must take a firm stand against evil and never relax our efforts to uproot the sinful inclinations in those under our care. Nevertheless, this must be done in a calm and gentle manner. To use a comparison, nothing is better calculated to break the impact of a cannonball than bags of wool.

Even when a correction is reasonable and just, it is never as effective when accompanied by a violent temper as when given with reserve. Beings endowed with reason are readily persuaded to follow reason, but they yield to anger only under compulsion. Whenever anger accompanies reason, reason itself becomes odious; and its inherent goodness suffers. As St. Augustine observed, it is far easier to bar anger completely from the soul, even though it appears justified, than to stop it halfway. For, once it has gained a foothold, an heroic effort is needed to dislodge it. Once the sun has gone down upon our anger, anger takes possession; it turns to hate as the darkness of night sets in, and there remains hardly any means of riddance.

January 30

ST. MARTINA, Virgin and Martyr

You are fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household

1. St. Martina. Over the historical existence of St. Martina hangs a dark cloud of doubt and uncertainty. In Christian antiquity there is no trace of her veneration. According to the second nocturn, Martina, a Roman virgin, was the daughter of a proconsul; both of her parents died while she was still a child. For love of Christ she distributed her possessions to the poor. Under Emperor Alexander Severus she was ordered to worship the false gods, an act utterly abhorrent to her. She was therefore scourged, and lacerated with iron hooks. After suffering many other tortures, she was finally beheaded. Her death occurred about 230; her relics are said to have been found in 1634, during the papacy of Urban VIII and placed in the church of St. Martina in the Roman Forum. Urban VIII spared no efforts in promoting her veneration; and due to him the Office was enhanced with proper hymns for Matins and Lauds. The Roman Martyrology puts her death on January 1.

At this point I would like to insert the following observations. Our devotion to the liturgy should not make us less devoted to the truth. Therefore, it troubles us to find saints honored in the Church's official books whose very existence is highly questionable. Toward ancient and venerable legends we could show a certain sympathy, particularly as they embody and manifest highest Christian ideals, as, for example, the pious traditions concerning Agnes, Sebastian, etc. But hagiography of the type associated with St. Martina, which accumulates every possible marvel and torture (*see* Lessons 4, 5, 6 at Matins) without historical support, must be rejected simply out of a true appreciation of the liturgy. There is no need for us Catholics to invent martyrs; a plentiful number of genuine heroic witnesses to the faith do exist. — As long as Martina remains in the Missal and Brevi-

ary, we may meet the situation by regarding her as a literary symbol representing all virgin-martyrs of the early Church. Her name (Martina, derived from Mars, the Roman war-god) and her church (once the Senate chamber in the Roman Forum) would represent Christianity's victory over paganism.

2. Holy Mass (Loquebar). The Mass combines the bridal theme with that of martyrdom. The *Introit* depicts the saint standing fearless before her judges; the entrance of the priest suggests the holy virgin's blameless "walking" in the Lord (Ps. 118). At the *Epistle* we listen with rapt attention as the saint voices her thanks "to Thee, O Lord, O King," for help in the hour of trial, amid the "roar of lions" and the "oppressing flames." In the two *chants* that follow we see the nuptial cortege of Christ and His bride, the Church; in our virgin-martyr the bride became most perfectly conformed to the Bridegroom.

The *Gospel,* Christ's parable of the virgin-brides who with burning lamps went forth in the night to meet the Bridegroom, has its fulfillment in Martina, in the Church, in us. How beautifully it applies to the holy martyr's death, while at Mass it applies to us. For at the *Offertory* we come to the altar as Christ's spouses, bearing the burning lamps of divine love and willingness to suffer; moreover, we are "offered" (*offerentur, Off.*) "as virgins" to the King present upon His throne, the altar. The *Communion* banquet again proves that only the Eucharist supplies the strength and courage to bear suffering.

3. The Liturgy and Light. "Then all the virgins arose and put their lamps in order." This beautiful bridal parable on the ten virgins and their lamps brings to mind the coming "feast of lights," Candlemas. It is therefore quite appropriate to review beforehand the meaning of light in the liturgy. Light is a symbol for God and for divine life; while darkness represents the devil and his work, sin. The whole liturgical year may be approached from the viewpoint of light. The winter cycle is like night, with darkness gradually yielding to light; while the summer cycle is like day, representing Light's triumph over Darkness. The liturgical day is likewise dominated by the light theme. Little

wonder, then, that light is so prominent a feature in divine worship itself. It always tells the same message, viz., *divine life emanating from Him.*

There will be lights burning wherever and whenever Christ appears. Candles are prescribed for Mass; a light must be kept glowing before the tabernacle; special candles are carried at the solemn singing of the Gospel (Christ's word). It is why added candles are lighted at the consecration, and why the Easter candle is solemnly blessed and burns at Mass during the season of Christ's resurrection.

Burning candles also belong in the hands of the faithful. The reason? Because they possess the divine life of grace. At baptism the Christian receives a burning light from the Church, and at his first Communion he again carries a candle. In his home, his little Church — *ecclesiola* — the devout Catholic lights candles for family devotions and in time of storms or special needs. Lastly, about the Christian are burning candles when at his last hour he goes to meet Christ his Bridegroom in the night of death. On Candlemas Day we will again receive a blessed candle from the hand of the priest. By this ceremony the Church reminds us to walk day after day as men of Light, as Christ-bearers, Light-bearers.

January 31

ST. JOHN DON BOSCO, Confessor

Love is the mightiest force on the face of the earth

By their example the saints continue their work on earth. The day before yesterday we met St. Francis of Sales; he has a spiritual son in Don Bosco.

1. **St. John Don Bosco.** *Day of death*: January 31, 1888. *Picture*: as a priest and foster father surrounded by small children and teen-agers; or as a priest and leader in a modern industrial city. *Life.* Don Bosco was born August 16, 1815, in the town

of Becchi near Turin. His parents were poor, his father died when he was not yet two years old.

At the age of ten little John Bosco had a dream. Christ was leading him into the midst of a group of turbulent, boisterous juveniles who were yelling and cursing with abandon. It was enough to anger anyone, and John was ready to use his fists. But Christ checked him, "Not with blows; with love and gentleness will you make these your friends." John watched, and the youths changed into hounds, wolves, lions, bears. Then our Lord spoke again: "Here is your lifework, here you will labor. Become humble, strong, manly, and you will effect the same change among My sons that you will now see among these animals." At once John saw the wild beasts turning into meek, little lambs and flock around Christ. This was Don Bosco's prophetic vision; in it he saw his vocation to the priesthood and his future role as father to neglected children.

But having nothing, how was he to become a priest? Young John earned what he could, resorting to every possible means. He caught birds and built cages, wove hats, gathered mushrooms, spun wool and flax, bred silkworms, darned stockings, and somewhat later acted as private tutor to backward pupils. There was hard work as a farm lad and sheepherder. In every task he showed courage and constancy far beyond his years. Nor did he forget God or his studies. His early education came from his mother and from certain priests. Later he was sent to school at Castelnuovo. Here he boarded with a needy tailor, where he learned tailoring and music. From neighbors he learned how to repair shoes and how to stitch. Later, at a school in Chieri, he learned to cook and bake.

Don Bosco was richly endowed, mentally and physically. In 1841 he was ordained to the priesthood. From then until death he strove, with enviable success, to accomplish the work Christ had laid before him in that childhood dream. From the streets and town squares he gathered boys of every age, "nobody's children," as it seemed. With them he played and prayed; taught them the mysteries of the faith; and begged for them. In short,

he was both priest and father to them. His work, however, did not meet universal approval. Some showed themselves openly hostile, some went so far as to label him "mentally ill" because he consorted with scamps.

But Don Bosco continued his work unperturbed. The love of Christ impelled him, and his "ruffians" responded with passionate devotion. When in 1846 he fell critically ill, hundreds of them prayed and fasted that God would restore their father. And when he died on January 31, 1888, twelve offered their own lives to God in return for his. So great was their love and devotion to him, their father. Don Bosco's work lives on in his spiritual sons and daughters. The Don Bosco-Salesian priests and sisters now continue his noble task of saving youths for Christ. *Application.* Listen closely to the words our saint spoke to his fellow workers from his deathbed:

"Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. . . . It will be a happy day for you when you succeed in overcoming an enemy by good deeds. Do not let the sun go down on your anger, and never call to mind a bygone injury or mistreatment. Never remind another of a hurt or injustice that had been forgotten. Let it always be from the heart when you say: 'Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.' And this forgiveness should be with complete and lasting forgetfulness of everything that ever hurt or harmed you. Let us embrace everybody with brotherly love."

2. Holy Mass. St. John Don Bosco offers the holy Sacrifice with us. He is the Solomon of our time to whom "God gave wisdom and unlimited prudence, and a big, open heart, spreading out as the sand at the seashore" (*Intr.*). And from those bands of boys reclaimed and saved by him comes back a song of praise and thanks to God — *Laudate pueri Dominum* (*Intr. psalm*). Through the intercession of St. John, the sainted priest-father, we beseech God to grant us ardent love of neighbor, yearning zeal for the salvation of immortal souls, and complete self-surrender — in a word, Don Bosco's chiefest virtues (*Coll.*).

The *Epistle* (a passage from Paul's letter to his beloved com-

munity at Philippi) brings the apostle before us; he gives practical instructions because he first practiced his own precepts. There are overtones as Paul alludes to St. John Bosco; and we think of how this modern saint "made known his modesty to all men." Don Bosco lived "in Christ" and therefore sought, like his divine Master, to become all things to all men. His weapons were love and kindness; with these he overcame every obstacle. He was a man of heroic stature, a man whose first and last resource was God's almighty power. In the name of Don Bosco, Paul concludes: Let peace and joy abide in your hearts; these are the marks of God's children, and the wellsprings of true holiness.

In the Epistle Paul introduced Don Bosco to us; now the saint himself speaks: "Have trust in God, and do good. Dwell in the Lord, and you will be truly blessed (*Grad.*). Only those who are free from earthly attachments will praise God's Name" (*All.*). It is not difficult to follow Christ, he tells us in the *Gospel.* You need observe perfectly just one of His precepts. He himself — Don Bosco — set the precedent. He took seriously the words: "Whoever receives one such little child for My Name's sake, receives Me." And by fulfilling this one precept, he became happy, holy, humble of heart; and pleasing to God.

At the *Offertory* Don Bosco tell us how to come before God *filled with holy fear and reverence.* And what is it we should bring? Don Bosco had the answer: *All our love.* We must love God in all things and above all things. Ours must be a jealous love of God, brooking no rival. To live should mean to praise His glory (*Secr.*). Again at the *Eucharistic banquet* our saint urges complete self-surrender to Christ. By his life he showed what it meant to do all things in Christ — with nothing other to rely upon. Humanly speaking, his work should have failed from the start; without Christ he could have only despaired. With Christ, however, he "believed in hope, against hope," and was infinitely successful.

3. Don Bosco's Method of Education. Don Bosco knew only one method of teaching, perfect love. People looked for what

GOD IS WONDERFUL
IN HIS SAINTS!
HE IT IS
WHO GIVES HIS PEOPLE
STRENGTH AND COURAGE +

they thought to be his own special technique and found none. Once when he was asked to define his particular system of education, he replied, a bit upset: "I don't even know what it is myself! I simply go ahead as the Lord arranged things and circumstances require!" If pressed, he would go so far as to say: "It's the system of love bending over backward." For his first principle of education ruled out force and violent punishment in favor of kindliness and care. To him the teacher's function was not to punish those who lean toward delinquency but to remove the occasion.

According to Don Bosco, the teacher is not merely an instructor and guide, but a father and helper. He must be all things to his pupils if he hopes to develop their moral fiber and character. "To do good, one must have some courage and be ready to accept humiliation without wishing the same on another; and still be always loving and kind. This system yields excellent results. Anyone can achieve them who has the candid manner and mild disposition of a St. Francis de Sales." These words are Don Bosco's most revealing comment on the method he followed. When he therefore told his charges: "You know, don't you, that I was not pleased with you today?" or "Today behave in such a way that you need not be ashamed of it tomorrow," or "I hope we will all be together in heaven," when he spoke to them in words like these, he succeeded in making a much deeper impression upon them than he could have with harsh words or detailed regulations.

Don Bosco employed another method that should be mentioned. One day a disheartened teacher came to him complaining over the lack of success in his work. Don Bosco asked him: "Do you also pray for your pupils?" His love of God impelled him to become all things to all. Thus, instead of a mere lecturer he was a true teacher; and instead of a disciplinarian, a true father. He was the servant, the friend, the fellow pupil of his pupils. He sought to become a child that he might shepherd other children to Christ. Such were his educational methods.

February 1

ST. IGNATIUS, Bishop and Martyr

I am a kernel of wheat for Christ

1. St. Ignatius. *Day of death*: October 17, between 110 and 118 (the Roman Martyrology places his martyrdom on December 20). *Grave*: at Antioch. In the Martyrology we read: "At Rome, the holy bishop and martyr Ignatius. He was the second successor to the apostle Peter in the see of Antioch. In the persecution of Trajan he was condemned to the wild beasts and sent in chains to Rome. There, by the emperor's order, he was subjected to most cruel tortures in the presence of the Senate and then thrown to the lions. Torn to pieces by their teeth, he became a victim for Christ."

The bishop and martyr Ignatius occupies a foremost place among the heroes of Christian antiquity. His final journey from Antioch to Rome was like a nuptial procession and a Way of the Cross. For the letters he wrote along the way resemble seven stations of the Cross; they may also be called seven nuptial hymns overflowing with the saint's intense love for Christ Jesus and his longing to be united with Him. These letters are seven most precious jewels in the heirloom bequeathed to us by the Church of sub-apostolic times.

The year of St. Ignatius' death is unknown; perhaps it occurred during the victory festivities in which the Emperor Trajan sacrificed the lives of 10,000 gladiators and 11,000 wild beasts for the amusement of the bloodthirsty populace. The scene of his glorious triumph and martyrdom was most likely the Colosseum; that mammoth structure, glittering with gold and marble, had then been just completed. The Roman liturgy honors the memory of St. Ignatius by daily mentioning his name in the Canon and by selecting a sentence from his letters for the Communion verse today, a rarest distinction.

"From Syria to Rome I must do battle with beasts on land and sea. For day and night I am chained to ten leopards, that

is, the soldiers who guard me and grow more ferocious the better they are treated. Their mistreatment is good instruction for me, yet am I still far from justified. Oh, that I may meet the wild beasts now kept in readiness for me. I shall implore them to give me death promptly and to hasten my departure. I shall invite them to devour me so that they will not leave my body unharmed as already has happened to other witnesses. If they refuse to pounce upon me, I shall impel them to eat me. My little children, forgive me these words. Surely I know what is good for me. From things visible I no longer desire anything; I want to find Jesus. Fire and cross, wild beasts, broken bones, lacerated members, a body wholly crushed, and Satan's every torment, let them all overwhelm me, if only I reach Christ."

The saint, now condemned to fight the wild beasts, burned with desire for martyrdom. On hearing the roar of the lions he cried out: "I am a kernel of wheat for Christ. I must be ground by the teeth of beasts to be found bread (of Christ) wholly pure" (*Comm.*).

2. **Holy Mass (Mihi autem).** Composed especially for today's feast, the Mass mirrors the life of St. Ignatius with consummate artistry. Ardent love of the Cross was the distinctive trait of his noble soul; hence, most of the texts treat of love toward Christ. With the opening words of the *Introit* we take up the cross, or better, we mount it with Christ. In the *Epistle*, a celebrated passage from Romans, St. Paul reveals his heart as he asks: "Shall anything separate me from the love of Christ? Tribulation, want, hunger, nakedness, danger, persecution, the sword?" The *Alleluia* verse continues on the same high plane: "With Christ I am nailed to the Cross! No longer am I alive — it is Christ who lives in me." Glorious words enwreathed by *Alleluias*!

The dying-with-Christ theme which characterizes our feast is beautifully expressed in the grain of wheat figure, a symbolism sustained throughout the Mass. It appears in the *Gospel* as a similitude; it is suggested at the *Offertory* and *Consecration* by the wheaten host; it finds mystic expression at *Communion* in the rapturous, final outcry of our saint. In the *Gospel* Christ

Himself is that grain of wheat. For as St. Augustine explains at Matins: "The Lord Jesus Himself was that kernel of wheat; He was destined to die and to be multiplied — to die through the unbelief of the Jews, to be multiplied through the faith of many nations. And He urges all of us to follow in the footsteps of His passion, saying: 'He who loves his life will lose it.'"

By dying the divine Grain of Wheat produced a large ear, the Mystical Body, the Church. Now what happens to the Head happens to the members. In turn each Christian becomes a grain of wheat that matures for the mill of martyrdom! Read the Communion as if it were your own composition. I, a kernel of wheat! I, too, am destined for the mill of suffering, to be ground — not only was it true of Ignatius. What type of beasts' teeth will crush me? Persecution? Pain and suffering? Other people? It makes no difference, the kernel must die, either buried in the ground to produce another stalk or crushed to become bread. Is not this our destiny in life, to die to self or to lose ourselves in service to others?

3. The Letters of St. Ignatius. It would be very worthwhile to procure a copy of St. Ignatius' seven Letters and read at least one or the other during the next few days. Read them as the outpouring of a soul made to you personally on the way to martyrdom. The venerable bishop's holy desire for a martyr's death is best voiced in his Letter to the Romans as he pleads with fellow Christians to forego any attempt to deliver him. This letter has been called "the loveliest lyric in Christian literature." Repeatedly and in all the letters, Ignatius appeals for unity and harmony in the Christian community. If you love the liturgy, you will study these letters; for they are imbued with that primitive Christian spirit which gave rise to our liturgy. It is a spirit we must make our own if we wish to acquire genuine liturgical piety.

Now a few passages from various letters.

On divine worship. "See to it that you come together very frequently to celebrate the Eucharist of God and to praise His Name. For, if you come together often, Satan's power is broken,

and his pernicious influence destroyed by your concord in the faith" (*Letter to the Ephesians, ch.* 13).

"Now if the prayer of this or that person has such great power, how much more the plea of the bishop and of the whole Church! Anyone, therefore, who does not come to the common worship of God is already possessed with pride and has pronounced his own condemnation" (*ibid., ch.* 5).

On the holy Eucharist. "My joy is not in the food that perishes, nor in the pleasures of this life. It is God's Bread I want, the Bread from heaven, the Bread of Life, which is the Flesh of Jesus Christ, the Son of God . . . and I want the Cup of God, His Blood, because It is imperishable love and everlasting life" (*Letter to the Romans, ch.* 7).

On Christ. Christ appears everywhere in Ignatius' letters; it is difficult to make a choice. "There is only one Jesus Christ, nor is there anything that is better than He" (*Letter to the Magnesians, ch.* 7).

On unity and obedience. "Heed the bishop, that God may heed you. I am offering myself for those who are obedient to the bishop, priests and deacons. . . . Be concerned about each other. Strive together, walk and suffer and take your rest together, rise together. . . . Be patient and mild with one another, as God is with you" (*Letter to Polycarp, ch.* 6).

The Christian and time. "A Christian does not have full power over himself, for even his time belongs to God" (*ibid., ch.* 7).

Happy death. "It is good to vanish from the world like the setting sun and follow a course unto God so that in Him I may rise again" (*Letter to the Romans, ch.* 2).

For the Feast of the Purification, see p. 370.

February 3

ST. BLASE, Bishop and Martyr

The St. Blase Blessing

1. **St. Blase.** *Day of death*: February 3, about 316 (?). *Grave*: his relics were brought to the West during the Crusades (among other places, to St. Blase). *Picture*: as a bishop with an ax, the instrument by which he was martyred; and in his hand, two candles. *Life.* The Martyrology gives the following:

"At Sebaste in Armenia (Asia Minor), the death of the holy bishop and martyr Blase. He had worked many miracles when, by command of Agricolaus, the governor, he was scourged unusually long and then suspended from a wooden trestle. Here his flesh was torn from the bone with iron combs; and then he was thrown into a gruesome dungeon. After a vain attempt to drown him in a lake, the same official ordered him and two young companions beheaded. Before him, seven women had been subjected to dreadsome torture and then slain; for they were recognized as Christians when they tried to gather and keep as a relic the blood dripping from Blase's lacerated body." (The above details are legendary.)

Before becoming bishop, Blase was a practicing physician. For pastoral reasons and in imitation of Christ's example, the art of healing was at that time frequently combined with priestly activity. He suffered probably under Licinius (316), and is venerated as a great miracle worker, being numbered among the "Fourteen Holy Helpers." The saint's assistance is invoked in spiritual distress resulting from the withholding of grave sins, and also against throat illnesses. The latter devotion stems from his miraculous cure of a child that was choking to death from a fishbone lodged in its throat. It is for protection against illness of the throat that the Church today imparts the St. Blase blessing.

2. **Holy Mass (Sacerdotes Dei).** The Mass is the second given in the Common of a Martyr Bishop. As the priest enters, we are

reminded of the venerable bishop Blase. The Church summons the clergy and the laity ("ye holy and humble of heart") to praise God in song; and in their *Benedicite* all creation joyfully joins. Both Readings describe our martyr, and both are richly theological. *Gospel*: Immediately after Peter's solemn confession at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus began to dispose the apostles for His death on the Cross. It was then that He foretold His passion and spoke about His crucifixion. Here He goes a step farther; not only will He be made to suffer, His disciples too must take up the Cross and follow Him. This sermon the Church brings to us on the feast of our holy martyr-bishop, for Blase's life was a practical exemplification of Christ's words. He denied himself, he took up the Cross, he hated his life on earth. As a result, the Lord's promise is also exemplified in him: The Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father and with His angels in order to render recompense.

In the *Epistle* the holy martyr stands before us and says: Only by sharing my suffering can you share my "consolation." At the *Offertory,* therefore, we place the cross of our life on the altar, and in holy Communion receive the pledge of the heavenly "crown of precious stones" (*Comm.*).

3. The Sacramentals. Today the Church bestows the St. Blase blessing. The occasion is opportune to do some serious thinking on blessings in general. The Church shows her motherly love not only in the profusion of spiritual gifts through the Eucharistic sacrifice, the sacraments, and the Divine Office, but also in her concern for our smaller daily needs. She is interested in every type of human activity and would help along in any situation. This she does through the *sacramentals;* or you may use the term *blessings or consecrations.* These "little sacraments" may be divided into three classes, according to their three-fold purpose, viz., (a) to ready the prerequisites for divine worship; (b) to enhance the externals of cult; or (c) to sanctify daily life.

To the first class belong those blessings by which places and thing are permanently set aside for use in the worship of God. Whatever is intended exclusively for divine service must be

sanctified and segregated from the world, for the world is still the devil's.

The second set of sacramentals serves to make the worship of God more attractive and edifying. This group would include the whole array of rites and ceremonies, and such objects as incense, candles, holy water, sacred vestments and vessels, and other sanctuary appointments.

The purpose of the third category is to channel the manifold blessings of redemption into every compartment of human activity. These manifold blessings are still too little known and appreciated. There is scarcely an object of daily use or occasion or circumstance for which the Church does not have a special blessing; or any misfortune over which she is at a loss to provide solace and healing. Among such sacramentals are today's St. Blase blessing and, in part, yesterday's blessing of candles; the blessing of homes on Epiphany; of wine on the feast of St. John, of food on Easter, etc. English editions of the Ritual with the blessings in whole or in part *are* available. Liturgical living is not complete without an understanding and use of the Church's sacramentals.

February 4

ST. ANDREW CORSINI, Bishop

Through penance and mortification

1. St. Andrew. *Day of death*: January 6, 1373. *Grave*: in Florence, at the Carmelite monastery; his body remains incorrupt. Canonized in 1629; his feast was added to the Roman calendar in 1660. *Picture*: as a bishop with a wolf and a lamb at his feet. *Life.* St. Andrew Corsini lived from 1302 to 1373. While still carrying him in her womb, his mother dreamed she had given birth to a wolf that sauntered to the gate of the Carmelite monastery, and entering the vestibule of the church, was changed to a

lamb. Andrew was reared as a pious and God-fearing youth, but little by little he succumbed to the pleasures of the world in spite of frequent warnings and reproofs from his mother. After he became aware that his parents had vowed him to the service of Blessed Mary, he mended his ways and at the age of seventeen entered the Carmelite Order. Though persistently tempted and assailed by the devil, he never swerved from his holy decision. A man of austere penance, he fasted continuously, always wore a hair shirt, and prayed the penitential psalms daily. For humility's sake he often washed the feet of the poor and beggars. His special gift from God was the grace to effect the conversion of hardened sinners. In 1360, despite his efforts to the contrary, he was made bishop of Fiesole in Tuscany.

2. Holy Mass. The Mass (*Statuit*) occupies the first place in the Common of a Confessor Bishop. In each diocese the bishop is the faithful "steward" divinely appointed to administer the fountains of supernatural life, God's word and the sacraments. In him, also, Christ's High Priesthood reaches full stature. The priest at the altar is the bishop's representative. In him, in his words, and in his actions the texts of the Mass see our saint, and in our saint the divine High Priest, Christ Jesus. As the priest approaches the altar, the Church voices her joy and gratitude over Andrew's providential choice as bishop: "The Lord entrusted to him the covenant of peace (i.e., the Church's treasures); and made him a prince (in His kingdom)." The *Introit* continues with Psalm 131 which gives the terms of a bilateral agreement; David promises to build a temple to Yahweh, and Yahweh promises David an eternal throne. In the Introit David represents our saint and bishop, who labored faithfully for the Church and thereby gained not merely an "eternal throne" for himself but a multitude of graces for others.

The *Epistle* continues to extol the ways of divine Providence which brought our sainted bishop the episcopate: "Behold, here (in the priest) stands the high priest (Andrew — Christ) who in his days pleased God." He was an agent of reconciliation and redemption. With increasing enthusiasm the liturgy describes

his episcopal elevation: "God gave him the crown of glory and made an everlasting covenant with him. . . . He was to exercise the office of priest, praising His Name and making a worthy incense offering, the sweetest of odors." The Lesson echoes back in the *Gradual*; for its message filled us with wonder and amazement. At the *Alleluia* verse the divine High Priest, who is about to offer the sacrifice "according to the order of Melchisedech," mounts the ambo; He is returning to demand an account of the talents entrusted to His servant. These talents are the graces of the priesthood. Today, the day of his death, our holy bishop Andrew "enters into the joy of his Lord." We have not received as many talents; but the two we were given must be used well.

The Sacrifice proper is about to begin. At the altar stands our sainted bishop, "David anointed with holy oil." He is there in the name of Christ, the divine High Priest whose "arm" supports him (*Off.*). Our Offertory oblation includes all the talents God has entrusted to us. During this very service He comes to demand an account as well as to render judgment. The pledge of being "placed over many things" is the Eucharist; today we receive It from our holy bishop, "the wise and faithful servant whom the Lord placed over His family, and who now gives us the divine Wheat in due measure" (*Comm.*).

February 5

ST. AGATHA, Virgin and Martyr

Qui potest capere, capiat

1. St. Agatha (*etym.*, good, excellent) is the last of the four great virgin-martyrs of the Roman Church whose names occur in the Canon and whose feasts are celebrated month by month during the winter. The four are Cecilia (November), Lucy (the "shining one," in December, heralding the Light of Christmas), Agnes (the "pure," in January), and Agatha (the "good," in

February). The latter's martyrdom probably took place during the Decian persecution (254). She enjoyed wide veneration in ancient times.

It is impossible to write an historically reliable account of St. Agatha's life. The "Acts" of her martyrdom are legendary, dating from the sixth century; from these "Acts" much is culled for use in the Breviary today, particularly antiphons, responsories, and the second nocturn readings. As prayers in the Divine Office these texts are not without a certain spiritual value.

According to these sources Agatha was a Sicilian virgin of noble extraction. Quintianus, governor of Sicily, became deeply enamored of her; but she rejected his advances. As a result she was charged with being a Christian and brought before his tribunal. To the question concerning her origin she replied: "I am noble-born, of a distinguished family, as all my relatives will attest" (*1. Ant., 1. Noct.*). When asked why she lived the servile life of a Christian, she answered: "I am a handmaid of Christ, and that is why I bear the outward appearance of a slave; yet this is the highest nobility, to be a slave to Christ" (*2. and 3. Ant., 1. Noct.*). The governor threatened her with the most dreadful tortures if she did not renounce Christ. Agatha countered: "If you threaten me with wild beasts, know that at the Name of Christ they grow tame; if you use fire, from heaven angels will drop healing dew on me" (*1. and 2. Ant., 2. Noct.*).

After being tortured, "Agatha went to prison radiant with joy and with head held high as though invited to a festive banquet. And she commended her agony to the Lord in prayer" (*3. Ant., 2. Noct.*). The next day, as she again stood before the judge, she declared: "If you do not cause my body to be torn to pieces by the hangmen, my soul cannot enter the Lord's paradise with the martyrs (*1. Ant., 3. Noct.*). She was then stretched on the rack, burned with red-hot irons, and despoiled of her breasts. During these tortures she prayed: "For love of chastity I am made to hang from a rack. Help me, O Lord my God, as they knife my breasts (*3 Ant., 3. Noct.*). Agatha rebuked the governor for his barbarity: "Godless, cruel, infamous tyrant, are you

not ashamed to despoil a woman of that by which your own mother nursed you?" (*1. Resp.*).

Returning to prison, she prayed: "You have seen, O Lord, my struggle, how I fought in the place of combat; but because I would not obey the commands of rulers, my breasts were lacerated" (*2. Ant., 3. Noct.*). In the night there appeared to her a venerable old man, the apostle Peter, with healing remedies. Agatha, ever delicately modest, hesitated to show him her wounds. "I am the apostle of Christ; distrust me not, my daughter" (*1. Ant., Lauds*). To which she replied: "I have never used earthly medicines on my body. I cling to the Lord Jesus Christ, who renews all things by His word" (*2 Ant., Lauds*). She was miraculously healed by St. Peter: "Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, I give you praise because by Your apostle You have restored my breasts" (*4 Ant., Lauds*). Throughout the night a light illumined the dungeon. When the guards fled in terror, her fellow prisoners urged her to escape but she refused: "Having received help from the Lord, I will persevere in confessing Him who healed me and comforted me" (*4. Resp.*).

Four days later she was again led before the judge. He, of course, was amazed over her cure. Nevertheless, he insisted that she worship the gods; which prompted another confession of faith in Christ. Then by order of the governor, Agatha was rolled over pieces of sharp glass and burning coals. At that moment the whole city was rocked by a violent earthquake. Two walls collapsed, burying two of the governor's friends in the debris. Fearing a popular uprising, he ordered Agatha, half dead, to be returned to prison. Here she offered her dying prayer: "Blessed Agatha stood in the midst of the prison and with outstretched arms prayed to the Lord: O Lord Jesus Christ, good Master, I give You thanks that You granted me victory over the executioners' tortures. Grant now that I may happily dwell in Your never-ending glory." Thereupon she died.

A year after her death the city of Catania was in great peril from an eruption on Mount Etna. Pagans, too, were numbered among those who fled in terror to the saint's grave. Her veil was

taken and held against the onrushing flames, and suddenly the danger ceased. The *Benedictus antiphon* describes the incident: "The pagan multitude fled to the saint's grave, and held her veil against the fire. Thus did the Lord show that they were saved from the fire's danger by the merits of the holy martyr Agatha." Her grave is venerated at Catania in Sicily.

2. Holy Mass (Gaudeamus). Its various proper texts distinguish the formulary from other virgin-martyr Masses; a very marked Greek-Sicilian influence can be detected. The Mass begins in festal spirit: "Let us all rejoice in the Lord. . . ." This *Introit,* borrowed from Greek liturgy for today's feast, was later adapted to a number of other Masses, e.g., All Saints. Above us and with us the angels are rejoicing over Agatha's glorious passion. The Church's nuptial song (Psalm 44) is used with most of the chanted texts. Both Readings are proper. The *Epistle* reflects the saint's apology before the pagan judge; it also develops a point in the *Oration,* namely, God chooses the small and the weak to confound the big and the strong. "Christ, by God's providence, has become our wisdom, justification, healing, and redemption." A good summary of the fruits readied for us today in the holy Eucharist.

In the *Gospel* Christ speaks of virginity "for the sake of the kingdom of heaven." Agatha was "able to take it," and as proof shed her blood. The *Gradual* shows us the virgin in combat with the "surging torrents" of suffering from which she proceeds joyful and triumphant; then in the *Alleluia* she proclaims "God's testimonies in the presence of kings." While receiving holy *Communion* the faithful pray words first spoken by the saint: "He who deigned to heal my every wound and to restore my breasts, Him I invoke as the living God."

3. The Communion Verse. Today seems to call for some special study into the nature of this prayer. Perhaps it is the only instance of use in the Missal of words ascribed to a saint by legend. Furthermore, it departs from the common practice of taking antiphons only from Sacred Scripture. Apart from this point, however, our present-day approach to holy Communion is very

different. Even the type of statement made by St. Agatha would go counter to our spirit of Christian reserve and modesty. For a Communion prayer we would prefer one that would express the idea of food or of Christ's presence. In Missal texts there seldom is reference to Christ's coming into our hearts or holding conversation with us. For in ancient Christian piety, the Eucharist was the *sacrifice banquet, nourishing the life of grace.* This theology underlies the words by which St. Agatha describes her cure and the restoration of her breasts. The liturgy is saying: The Eucharist has the power to heal; the healing of Agatha's wounds is repeated spiritually in our regard through the medicine of the Eucharist.

Another observation. Agatha's words are put on the lips of the assembled faithful because the assembled faithful approach the sacred banquet in the person of the saint. It is a basic liturgical principle that at public worship the participants identify themselves with the saint commemorated, that they take the role of the saint and speak his thoughts. And at the Eucharistic banquet the saint comes to the fore more prominently than even the Eucharist Itself. Usually the text tells of the saint's transfiguration or glorification, a privilege we come to share through the Eucharist. Thus a correct approach to an unusual chant helps broaden our whole understanding of the liturgy and its spirit.

February 6

ST. TITUS, Bishop
ST. DOROTHY, Virgin and Martyr

That we may live temperately and justly and piously in this world

1. St. Titus. *Day of death*: January 4, about the year 100 A.D. (according to the Roman Martyrology). *Grave*: in his episcopal city, Gortyna, Crete. His head is honored in Venice.

Life. St. Titus, a pagan by birth, became one of St. Paul's most illustrious disciples. He accompanied the apostle on several of his missionary journeys and was entrusted with important missions. Finally he came with St. Paul to the island of Crete, where he was appointed bishop. He performed this duty in accordance with the admonition given him, ". . . in all things show yourself an example of good works" (Tit. 2:7).

Tradition tells us that he died a natural death at the age of 94, having lived in the state of virginity during his whole life. St. Paul left a worthy monument to Titus, his faithful disciple, in the beautiful pastoral letter which forms part of the New Testament. Today's feast in his honor was introduced in 1854.

2. St. Dorothy, (i.e., the gift of God), a virgin from Caesarea in Cappadocia, allegedly suffered a martyr's death under Diocletian. Her relics are honored in a church dedicated to her honor in the Trastevere section of Rome. (On the door of St. Dorothy's Church the names of those who had not received holy Communion during Easter time used to be posted.) Her feast was introduced into the Roman calendar during the Middle Ages.

A very edifying story is related in connection with her name. As Dorothy was being led to execution because of her faith in Christ, she prayed, "I thank You, O Lover of souls, for having called me to Your paradise." A certain Theophilus, an official of the Roman governor, jestingly retorted, "Farewell, bride of Christ, send me apples or roses from your Bridegroom's garden of bliss." Dorothy answered, "I most certainly will."

While devoting herself to prayer during the few moments permitted before receiving the death stroke, she beheld a vision of a beautiful youth who carried three apples and three roses in a napkin. She said to him, "I implore you to take these to Theophilus." Soon the sword severed her neck, and her soul returned to God.

As Theophilus was mockingly telling his friend of Dorothy's promise, a young man stood before him holding a linen in which were wrapped three beautiful apples and three magnificent roses.

"See, the virgin Dorothy sends you these from the garden of her Bridegroom, even as she promised you." Highly astonished, for it was February and everything in nature was frozen, Theophilus received the gifts and cried out: "Truly indeed, Christ is God." And soon he too died a martyr's death for publicly confessing the faith.

3. Holy Mass (Statuit). From the Common of a Confessor-Bishop. The *Gospel* recounts how Jesus sent out the seventy-two disciples to preach. Our thoughts light on Titus alongside the apostle of the Gentiles during one of his missionary journeys. In the *Collect* we again admire the liturgy's thoughtfulness; for a passage from the Epistle to Titus is woven into the text: ". . . that we should live temperately and justly and piously in this world" (Tit. 2:12).

4. The Epistle to St. Titus. It would be in full harmony with the spirit of the Church if on the day we celebrate the feast of a saint, we read something by or about the saint, or a document from the century in which he lived. This would aid us in acquiring the spirit of the saint and in modeling our lives after him. We have had several examples in the past weeks, viz., the life of St. Anthony by St. Athanasius, the authentic Acts of the martyr St. Polycarp, the letters of St. Ignatius.

Today and tomorrow we should read and study St. Paul's Epistle to Titus. Surely our saint esteemed this letter which he had received from his great teacher very highly and made it the rule of his life. Now, for several days, we too should try to live according to the spirit of the Epistle. Note, first of all, that it is a pastoral letter and hence can serve as a pastoral instruction for everyone in charge of souls; it is, in fact, a Magna Charta of priestly solicitude. The layman, too, will find much good in its pages. Cull out for special reflection the sublime passages on Christ. (The Epistles for the first two Masses on Christmas are taken from St. Paul's letter to Titus, 2:11–15 and 3:4–7, respectively.)

Our personal libraries ought to contain suitable literature by and about the saints in the sanctoral cycle.

February 7

ST. ROMUALD, Abbot

Penance with a joyful heart

1. St. Romuald. *Day of death*: June 19, 1027. Today marks the transfer of his remains from Val di Castro. *Grave*: at the monastery of St. Blase in Fabriano. The feast was instituted by Clement VIII in 1595. *Picture*: wearing the white Camaldolese habit, with a ladder upon which his monks are climbing heavenward. *Life*. St. Romuald, the founder of the Camaldolese Order, could not decide for a considerable time whether to serve God in religion or remain in the world. After his father had killed a relative in a duel at which he was forced to be present, he went to the monastery of St. Apollinaris, near Ravenna, and did penance for forty days. Later, he entered this same monastery as a monk. Then he became a follower of the hermit Marinus in Venice. In the course of time he founded an order of hermits which received its name after the most famous of his foundations, Camalduli in Tuscany.

Romuald's is one of the strictest orders for men in the West (actually a branch of the Benedictine Order). The members live isolated from one another in small huts, observing strictest silence and perpetual fasting, constantly praying or engaged in manual labor. Our saint enjoyed the special grace of bringing sinners, particularly those of rank and power, back to God. When he died, he was a little over seventy years; he had never used a bed, had always sought out ways of practicing severest penances. Fifteen years later his pupil, the holy doctor of the Church, St. Peter Damian, wrote his biography.

"His greatness lies in the rigorous and austere character of his interpretation of monastic life — an approach that was quite singular and unique. In the deepest recesses of his being, Romuald was an ascetic, a monk; not, perhaps, a monk of that serene peace and self-possession exemplified by St. Benedict in his life and described by him in his Rule. Nor was Romuald

an organizer who through prudent legislation enabled his spirit to flourish and affect great numbers. He reminds us of the stolid figures inhabiting the Eastern deserts, men who by most rigorous mortification and severest self-inflicted penances give a wanton world a living example of recollection and contemplation. Their very lives constituted the most powerful sermon. It is in company with men like these that St. Romuald continues to live." [1]

2. **Points from Romuald's Life.** Romuald was not at all a fluent reader. Whenever he made another of his many mistakes, Marinus, his teacher, beat him on his left cheek. Finally it became too much for Romuald. "But, dear master," he said modestly, "hit me on the right cheek in the future. My left ear is almost deaf." The master was surprised at such patience and thereafter acted more considerately.

The saint loved to say, "Better to pray one psalm with devotion and compunction than a hundred with distraction."

When the holy man felt his end was near, he retired to the monastery at Val di Castro. After so many journeys he was eager to begin his final pilgrimage to an eternal resting place. There he had a cell and a small chapel built, in which he could silently await death. Even though his aged body was growing weaker, he would neither lie down nor modify his strict fast more than absolutely necessary.

On a certain day, breathing became difficult, his strength vanished, and great fatigue overcame him. As the sun was beginning to set, he bade the two brothers who were with him to leave and lock his cell, and not to return until time for Lauds. Against their better judgment they consented, but then remained outside the door and listened. After a while, they no longer heard him breathe. They entered and lit the lamp. Romuald had passed away, quietly and alone, as he had told his brethren twenty years before.[2]

3. **Holy Mass (Os justi).** From the Common of an Abbot. Abbots occupy an intermediate place between bishops and con-

[1] *Bibel und Liturgie,* vol. 2, p. 145f.
[2] Cf. H. Bihlmeyer, *Vom Leben und Leiden unserer lieben Heiligen,* p. 156.

fessors. In his community the abbot is the head and the father, but does not possess the plenitude of priestly power as bishops do. This is expressed in the Mass. We see the abbot as the faithful and prudent administrator who, as the head of the family, provides the proper measure of bread at meal time (*Comm.* This same text appears as the Communion in the Common of a Confessor-Bishop and also in the Common of Doctors).

As a religious he faithfully fulfilled the Lord's counsel, he "left everything . . . house, brethren, father, mother, and lands" for Christ's sake, and therefore will shine with a greater glory than others at the parousia (*Gosp.*). Today, as he died, the Lord "met him with blessings" and "gave him his heart's desire . . . a crown of precious stones upon his head" (*Grad.* and *Off.*). Through the graces of holy Mass we can already take part in this elevation to glory.

The *Lesson* refers to his selection and installation as abbot, and to his mystical colloquies with God. The eremitical monk tries to fulfill the Gospel injunction literally. He "leaves all things" without exception. Romuald founded a new order of hermits, dedicated wholly to penance and mortification. Nevertheless, he bequeathed to his followers who expiate the sins of their fellow men, two priceless gifts — interior happiness and common worship. Though practicing the severest penances, the saint's face was always so cheerful as to gladden all who saw him. In the liturgy we too have the opportunity to unite a spirit of penance with happiness of heart.

February 8

ST. JOHN OF MATHA, Confessor

He freed his neighbor from bondage of body and soul

1. St. John of Matha. *Day of death*: December 17, 1213. *Grave.* His body was interred at St. Thomas de Formis, but

later transferred to Madrid. Today's feast in his honor was introduced in 1694. *Life.* John of Matha founded the Order of the Most Holy Trinity (Trinitarians). Its members dedicated themselves to the heroic work of ransoming Christian slaves.

When John was offering the holy Sacrifice of the Mass for the first time, he had a vision in which an angel appeared clothed in a white, gleaming garment, a red and blue cross on his breast, and his arms protectingly spread over two manacled slaves, a Christian and a Moor. Divinely illumined, the man of God immediately realized that he was being called to ransom captives.

He joined St. Felix of Valois in this great work, traveled frequently to North Africa and the coast of Spain, worked tirelessly in his noble mission. For many years the saint also acted as court chaplain and confessor to Pope Gregory IX. In France, he founded the monastery of Cerfroid in the diocese of Meaux. His was a heroic charity. Let us help our neighbor to cast off the shackles of sin and become spiritually free.

2. Holy Mass (Os justi). The Mass is from the Common of a Confessor, the beautiful Mass on the "watchful servant." A proper *Collect* relates the work of St. John to daily life, "Through God's assistance may we be delivered from bondage in body and soul." For further comment, see p. 393.

February 9

ST. CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA, Bishop and Doctor of the Church
ST. APOLLONIA, Virgin and Martyr

A champion of Mary's divine Motherhood

1. St. Cyril. *Day of death*: June 27, 444. *Grave*: unknown. *Feast*: prescribed by Pope Leo XIII in 1882. *Life.* St. Cyril is one of the great Greek fathers of the Church. He was chosen by divine Providence to be the shield and champion of the

Church against Nestorius, who denied the unity of person in Christ. If this heresy had succeeded, Mary would not be called the Mother of God.

Excepting Sts. Athanasius and Augustine, his equal as a defender of orthodoxy can hardly be found in the Church's history. His greatest achievement was the successful direction of the ecumenical council at Ephesus (431), of which he was the soul (Pope Celestine had appointed him papal legate). In this council two important dogmas were defined, viz., that there is but one person in Christ, and that Mary in the literal sense of the word can be called the Mother of God (*Theotokos*). His successful defense of the latter doctrine is his greatest title to honor, a point noted in today's Collect.

His writings show such depth and clarity that the Greeks called him the "seal of the fathers." He died in 444 A.D., after having been bishop for thirty-two years. In Rome, the basilica of St. Mary Major stands as a most venerable monument to the honor paid Mary at the Council of Ephesus. On the arch leading into the sanctuary important incidents in the lives of Jesus and Mary are depicted in mosaic.

2. Holy Mass (In medio). Note how certain texts in this Mass from the Common of Doctors apply to our saint, e.g., "preach the word, be urgent in season, out of season . . . for there shall come a time when they will not endure sound doctrine" (2 Tim. 4:1–8). St. Cyril lived in such a period. He was obliged to fight strenuously against the heresiarchs. But now he shines as a bright light in the candelabra of the Church (*Gosp.*).

The three Orations are proper; the *Collect* recalls how Cyril was "the invincible champion of Mary's divine Motherhood" and begs that we may be saved by her maternal protection. The *Secret* prays (again in reference to Cyril's struggles for the faith) that we may "worthily receive into our hearts our Lord Jesus Christ . . . who is co-eternal with God in His glory." The *Postcommunion* beseeches that "we may be enabled worthily to serve the most holy Mother of God's only-begotten Son" (such a Postcommunion could not have been composed in ancient times).

The feast of St. Cyril was introduced in the Western Church by Leo XIII for the purpose of inspiring Christendom to work for the unification of separated Churches.

3. St. Apollonia. The Martyrology reads: "At Alexandria the holy virgin Apollonia. Under the Emperor Decius (249–251) her teeth were beaten out; then the executioners built and lit a funeral pyre, and threatened to burn her alive unless she would repeat their blasphemies. After some reflection she suddenly tore herself loose from her tormentors and threw herself into the flames. The fire of the Holy Spirit that glowed within her was more intense than the burning pyre. Her executioners were astounded to see a weak woman willingly embracing death with such determination before they were ready to carry out their threats."

The saint was already well on in years. An account of St. Apollonia's martyrdom was written by Bishop Dionysius of Alexandria (died 265), a contemporary. She is honored as the patroness against toothache.

Apollonia, it might seem, committed suicide. Her act was used by the ancients as proof that it is permitted to escape dishonor or persecution through voluntary death. But the most authoritative moralists declare that even in such cases suicide is not permitted, and seek to justify Apollonia's heroic act by assuming that she acted according to a special mandate from God; without such a divine injunction no one is allowed to follow her example. The saints are not to be imitated on every point.

February 10

ST. SCHOLASTICA, Virgin

In the form of a dove she entered heaven

1. St. Scholastica was the sister of St. Benedict, the father of Western monasticism. Like her brother, she dedicated herself to God from early youth. Information on the virgin Scholastica

is very scanty. In his Second Book of Dialogues (Ch. 33 and 34) Pope St. Gregory has described for us the last meeting between brother and sister (cf. 2 nocturn):

"His sister Scholastica, who had been consecrated to God in early childhood, used to visit with him once a year. On these occasions he would go to meet her in a house belonging to the monastery a short distance from the entrance. For this particular visit he joined her there with a few of his disciples and they spent the whole day singing God's praises and conversing about the spiritual life.

"When darkness was setting in they took their meal together and continued their conversation at table until it was quite late. Then the holy nun said to him, 'Please do not leave me tonight, brother. Let us keep on talking about the joys of heaven till morning.' 'What are you saying, sister?' he replied. 'You know that I cannot stay away from the monastery.' The sky was so clear at the time, there was not a cloud in sight.

"At her brother's refusal Scholastica folded her hands on the table and rested her head upon them in earnest prayer. When she looked up again, there was a sudden burst of lightning and thunder accompanied by such a downpour that Benedict and his companions were unable to set foot outside the door. By shedding a flood of tears while she prayed, this holy nun had darkened the cloudless sky with a heavy rain. The storm began as soon as her prayer was over. In fact, the two coincided so closely that the thunder was already resounding as she raised her head from the table. The very instant she ended her prayer the rain poured down.

"Realizing that he could not return to the abbey in this terrible storm, Benedict complained bitterly. 'God forgive you, sister!' he said. 'What have you done?' Scholastica simply answered, 'When I appealed to you, you would not listen to me. So I turned to my God and He heard my prayer. Leave now if you can. Leave me here and go back to your monastery.'

"This, of course, he could not do. He had no choice now but to stay, in spite of his unwillingness. They spent the entire nigh-

together and both of them derived great profit from the holy thoughts they exchanged about the interior life. The next morning Scholastica returned to her convent and Benedict to his monastery.

"Three days later as he stood in his room looking up toward the sky, he beheld his sister's soul leaving her body and entering the heavenly court in the form of a dove. Overjoyed at her eternal glory, he gave thanks to God in hymns of praise. Then, after informing his brethren of her death, he sent some of them to bring her body to the abbey and bury it in the tomb he had prepared for himself. The bodies of these two were now to share a common resting place, just as in life their souls had always been one in God."

Her tomb is at Monte Cassino.

2. Holy Mass. Today's Mass, from the Common of Virgins (*Dilexisti*), easily surpasses all other formularies found in the Common from the viewpoint of theme unity. Practically all the component parts point to the bride-bridegroom relationship. The Church, Christ's spotless bride, makes her appearance in the holy virgin whose feast we are celebrating.

In the *Introit* we sing the "Church's Nuptial Hymn." The procession is a bridal one, with Scholastica leading. Picture to yourself a solemn pontifical procession advancing toward the altar while the faithful sing the complete text of Psalm 44. Christ, the royal Bridegroom, is the Church; Scholastica, the royal bride.

In the *Epistle* we are addressed as brides of Christ. The Bridegroom is jealous of His bride. He does not wish to share her with anyone; she should be "presented to her Bridegroom, Christ, as a chaste virgin." Psalm 44, the Church's nuptial hymn, is used for all four chants. When the deacon clad in festal dalmatic proceeds in solemn procession to the ambo with the Gospel book (Christ), we have another nuptial procession. There follows the *Gospel* with its thought-provoking Parable of the Five Wise Virgins (the five foolish serve only as dark background). *We* are these virginal brides (the acolytes with their candles make the symbolism more realistic).

At the *Offertory* procession, we brides of Christ approach nearer to our Beloved. The altar is Christ, the Offertory gifts are the lamps filled with oil, gifts for our Lover. During the Offertory procession the nuptial psalm is again sung; it occasions a new train of thought. The altar with its rich drapes ("embroidered in gold, with brilliant colors" — Ps. 44:13 f.) reminds us of the bridal queen, the Church, whom we surround as bridal virgins.

In the Sacrifice proper the Bridegroom appears, and at the Communion banquet we go once more as virginal brides to meet Christ the Lord — *obviam Christo Domino*. (Note how the various chant texts take on their full meaning precisely in connection with the Mass action.) For the fourth time, the Church's nuptial hymn is sung. During this entire day we feel ourselves as Christ's brides while the words of the Epistle keep ringing in our ears: "I am jealous for you with a divine jealousy. . . ."

With a soul innocent as a dove Scholastica flew to heaven. Inspired by her example may we order our lives in such a way as to insure our own everlasting happiness.

February 11

THE APPARITION OF MARY AT LOURDES

A Woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet

The proper approach is necessary to evaluate today's feast correctly. Frequently the Church uses a local event in order to present and develop an important dogma. This must be remembered when discussing such feasts as that of the Holy Cross, the Apparition of St. Michael the Archangel, and other feasts commemorative or votive in nature. In today's observance we should see a vindication as well as a presentation of the doctrine of Mary's Immaculate Conception.

1. **The Apparition at Lourdes.** The many miracles which have been performed through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin at Lourdes prompted the Church to institute a special commemorative feast, the "Apparition of the Immaculate Virgin Mary." The Office gives the historical background. Four years after the promulgation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1854), the Blessed Virgin appeared a number of times to a very poor and holy girl named Bernadette. The actual spot was in a grotto on the bank of the Gave River near Lourdes.

The Immaculate Conception had a youthful appearance and was clothed in a pure white gown and mantle, with an azure blue girdle. A golden rose adorned each of her bare feet. On her first apparition, February 11, 1858, the Blessed Virgin bade the girl make the sign of the Cross piously and say the rosary with her. Bernadette saw her take the rosary that was hanging from her arms into her hands. This was repeated in subsequent apparitions.

With childlike simplicity Bernadette once sprinkled holy water on the vision, fearing that it was a deception of the evil spirit; but the Blessed Virgin smiled pleasantly, and her face became even more lovely. The third time Mary appeared she invited the girl to come to the grotto daily for two weeks. Now she frequently spoke to Bernadette. On one occasion she ordered her to tell the ecclesiastical authorities to build a church on the spot and to organize processions. Bernadette also was told to drink and wash at the spring still hidden under the sand.

Finally on the feast of the Annunciation, the beautiful Lady announced her name, "I am the Immaculate Conception."

The report of cures occurring at the grotto spread quickly and the more it spread, the greater the number of Christians who visited the hallowed place. The publicity given these miraculous events on the one hand and the seeming sincerity and innocence of the girl on the other made it necessary for the bishop of Tarbes to institute a judicial inquiry. Four years later he declared the apparitions to be supernatural and permitted the public veneration of the Immaculate Conception in the grotto. Soon a chapel

was erected, and since that time numberless pilgrims come every year to Lourdes to fulfill promises or to beg graces.

2. Holy Mass (Vidi civitatem). For the most part the Mass has its own texts which allude to the wondrous apparition of Mary at Lourdes. The Immaculate is the holy city "descending arrayed as a bride" (*Intr.*). The *Collect's* introductory clause corresponds to that on December 8. "And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon was under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars" (*Epist.*). "Arise, my love, my beautiful one; and come, my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall" (*Grad.*). This verse recalls the grotto of the apparition.

In the *Gospel* and in the *Offertory* hymn we hear the "Ave" that never ceases to resound at Mary's shrine. The Eucharist, the bubbling spring that renders fruitful the ground of the soul, is symbolized by the miraculous fountain at Lourdes (*Comm.*). In the *Postcommunion* there is another allusion to the Lourdes pilgrimages, viz., through the blessings just received may we travel in safety to our heavenly fatherland.

February 12

THE SEVEN HOLY FOUNDERS OF THE SERVITE ORDER, Confessors

Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

1. The Seven Holy Founders. A rare event! Seven men of noble lineage forsake the world and live together in brotherly harmony. In their seven bodies there is but one soul, the same virtues and devotions unite them. Even death does not part them. For their bones, which rest in one coffin, are so intermingled that parts belonging to one body cannot be distinguished from the rest.

These seven men were the founders of the Servite Order, a

community instituted for the special purpose of cultivating the spirit of penance and contemplating the passion of Christ and Mary's Seven Sorrows. Due to the spirit of humility cherished by the members of the Order, their accomplishments are not too widely known. But in the field of home missions great things are to their credit, and certainly they have benefited millions by arousing devotion to the Mother of Sorrows.

The Breviary tells us that in the midst of the party strife current during the thirteenth century, God called seven men from the nobility of Florence. In the year 1233 they met and prayed together most fervently. The Blessed Mother appeared to each of them individually and urged them to begin a more perfect life. Disregarding birth and wealth, in sackcloth under shabby and well-worn clothing they withdrew to a small building in the country. It was September 8, selected so that they might begin to live a more holy life on the very day when the Mother of God began to live her holy life.

Soon after, when the seven were begging alms from door to door in the streets of Florence, they suddenly heard children's voices calling to them, "Servants of holy Mary." Among these children was St. Philip Benizi, then just five months old. Hereafter they were known by this name, first heard from the lips of children. In the course of time they retired into solitude on Monte Senario and gave themselves wholly to contemplation and penance. Leo XIII canonized the Holy Founders and introduced today's feast in 1888.

2. Holy Mass (Justi). New Mass formularies do not always conform to standard ancient types.[1] Today's reflects the classical taste of Pope Leo XIII. Its general purpose is to mirror the lives of the Seven Holy Founders. In the *Introit*, we hear the "just" singing their common song of praise. The final phrase of the antiphon reminds us of the children of Florence who gave the Servite Order its name. Psalm 8 was chosen with reference to the same incident, "Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings You have fashioned praise" **(Ps. 8:3).**

[1] Schuster, *Liber Sacramentorum*, Vol. 6, p. 209.

In the *Collect* the Church rejoices over having been enriched with a new family of servants, while weaving into the prayer the chief purpose of the Order, viz., to renew the memory of Mary's sorrows. The *Lesson* praises these "men of renown, our fathers" who have accomplished such marvels, and have bequeathed to us, their heirs, so glorious an example. In the *Gospel,* it is the Lord Himself who assures them of reward for "having left all things to follow Him." "The hundredfold . . . and life everlasting" are now ready before them.

In the *Offertory* hymn we see the seven saints on Monte Senario, praying and offering pleasing sacrifice to God. To some extent the *Secret* departs from traditional classic form. At the *Communion*, we see the fruit ripen, the seeds for which our saints planted in tears and toil. It is our privilege to harvest this fruit in the sacrifice banquet. Our concluding prayer is that we, like the Holy Founders, "may steadfastly remain at the foot of the Cross of Jesus in company with Mary His Mother, and may deserve to participate in the fruits of the Redemption."

"As one love of brotherhood and monastic life joined them together on earth, so one grave holds their dead bodies, and one honor is accorded them by the people. The Supreme Pontiffs Clement XI and Benedict XIII accordingly confirmed this honor which for centuries had been given to them in common" (The Roman Breviary, 2 nocturn).

February 14

ST. VALENTINE, Martyr

The martyr's crown

1. St. Valentine. *Day of death*: February 14, 269 (according to the Roman Martyrology). *Grave*: Rome, in the basilica dedicated to his honor. *Life.* This holy priest (the Missal, contrary to usual practice, introduces him as "*priest* and martyr") died

for the faith under Claudius II. The Martyrology says, "At Rome, on the Flaminian Way, the heavenly birthday of the blessed martyr Valentine, a priest. After performing many miraculous cures and giving much wise counsel he was beaten and beheaded under Claudius Caesar."

The church in which he is buried existed already in the fourth century and was the first sanctuary Roman pilgrims visited upon entering the Eternal City. (The saint is not to be confused with the Bishop of Terni who bears the same name.)

2. Holy Mass (In virtute). The joy Christians experience after triumphing over suffering is the dominant spirit in the "First Mass of a Martyr Not a Bishop." The priest entering for the *Introit* makes us think of our saint now in glory. He is rejoicing in God's power, he is happy among the elect; for his heart's deepest yearning is stilled, he stands as a conqueror wearing the crown of victory. (The entire Psalm 20 would be appropriate here. You need only to substitute the word "saint" for the word "king.")

The *Collect* begs the saint to deliver us "from the many dangers that beset us." In the *Epistle* the Church describes how Valentine lived, how the Lord "conducted the just . . . through the right ways and showed him the kingdom of God." It was God who guided him in the midst of battle; who aided him when needy; who descended with him into the depth of the prison and was with him when bound; who finally gave him "the sceptre of the kingdom" and "everlasting glory" (Wis. 10:10–14). In the Book of Wisdom the passage concerns Joseph, the son of Jacob; its application to Valentine becomes clearer if the picture of the boy sold into Egypt is kept in mind.

The *Gradual* is a real chorus, the congregation's response to the Lesson, "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord . . . his children shall be mighty upon the earth" (Ps. 111:1–2). We are Valentine's heirs ("his children") and together with him offer this Sacrifice.

Our Lord speaks of taking up the Cross and following Him in the *Gospel*. From Him we learn the meaning of martyrdom

and how to make it part of our lives. Christ speaks hard words, "I did not come to bring peace but the sword." Christianity means conflict, not a life of ease and pleasure. It is a war against flesh and blood, and this involves "taking up the Cross" and following Jesus. Our Savior is pointing constantly to the holy martyrs who have fulfilled His command most perfectly. Even though we may not be thrown into a life and death struggle as was our saint, we can still share the honor of "bearing witness" to Christ in little things, even if it calls for nothing more than reaching a cup of water to His servants.

In the *Offertory* hymn, we see the day's saint proceeding to the altar adorned with the crown of glory. For the *Communion* it is not the usual victory song but the Master's sobering words, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt. 16:24). Why this text at the Communion? Perhaps the Church wants to say: after Communion the Way of the Cross begins, and the source of your strength is in this sacred banquet.

February 15

STS. FAUSTINUS AND JOVITA, Martyrs

Love of Christ

1. **Sts. Faustinus and Jovita.** *Day of death*: February 15, about 120 A.D. (according to the Martyrology). The feast was introduced into the calendar toward the end of the Middle Ages. *Grave*: Brescia (northern Italy). *Their life.* The brothers Faustinus and Jovita preached the faith with great courage in Brescia during the persecution of Trajan. When bishop Apollonius, who had hidden himself during those troublesome times, was informed of their work, he ordained the former priest and the latter deacon. Soon, however, they were thrown into prison and subjected to much torment by the Emperor Hadrian, who at

that moment was in Brescia. Finally they were beheaded. The Breviary adds that they also suffered in Milan, Rome, and Naples. Their relics are venerated in Brescia.

2. Holy Mass (Salus autem). Today's is the third formulary in the Common for Several Martyrs. For a summarizing picture imagine Christ appearing at the head of His "white robed army of martyrs" in preview for the return on the last day (*Epist.* and *Gosp.*). The *Introit* directs our thoughts to the life of today's martyrs (the remaining verses of the psalm give further detail); evil persons were strong and fortunate, they oppressed the good, yes, tortured Faustinus and Jovita and put them to death, but God, the "salvation of the just," did not forsake them.

In the *Epistle*, the martyrs speak to us. They recall the "former days" when Christians, after "being enlightened (baptized), endured great suffering." They languished in prisons, sustaining the loss of all earthly goods with joy. Will you join them? "You have need of patience that, doing the will of God, you may receive the promise: For yet a very little while, and He who is to come, will come" (Heb. 10:32–38). (Now at Mass we are witnessing a dress rehearsal of the parousia.)

The *Gradual* reflects the sentiments of the Epistle. The martyrs cried out in their need and God heard them. It will not be otherwise with us, "For the Lord is close to the broken-hearted; and those who are crushed in spirit He saves." In the *Gospel* Christ appears amid the splendor of His martyrs (*Allel.*), and seeks to instill the spirit of martyrdom in His followers; what we hear during the silent hour of worship must be preached aloud to the whole world.

We must not fear those who can "kill the body"; in fact, apart from everlasting death, we need not fear anything. Rather our efforts will be directed toward developing a lively sense of God's good Providence, realizing that not even a hair goes lost without His knowledge. This attitude will aid us in becoming Christ's heralds upon earth, so that He "will confess us before the angels of God" at the Second Coming. Both Readings instill the spirit of martyrdom. In the first, the martyrs speak to us, in the second

Christ Himself. Both have the same purpose, both come to a climax in the parousia theme.

In the *Offertory* hymn, it is martyrdom again, but from a higher plane, "The souls of the just are in the hand of God . . . in the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, but they are in peace" (Wis. 3:1–3), i.e., they are enjoying the beatific vision. The *Communion* reminds us of the dark catacombs from which these witnesses unto blood came forth. What the Lord in the nightly stillness whispered into their ears, they "preached from the housetops." This is our duty, too. In the morning Mass Christ comes to us softly and, as it were, whispers in the darkness. Then we return to a hostile world as His witnesses. In what does the secret of our strength lie? In an abiding love of Christ. May such love come to us through receiving His Body and imitating the example of the saints.

February 18

ST. SIMEON, Bishop and Martyr

A blood relative of Christ

1. St. Simeon. A blood relative of Christ, a martyr from early apostolic times! Succeeding the apostle James, Simeon, the son of Cleophas, was, it may be said, the first bishop of Jerusalem. Under the Emperor Trajan he was arraigned before Atticus, the governor, on charges of being a Christian and a relative of Jesus. For at a certain period, all descendants of David were apprehended. After enduring all types of torture, he was affixed to a cross, even as His Savior. Those present marvelled how a man of such advanced age (he was 120 years old) could so steadfastly and joyously bear the excruciating pains of crucifixion. He died on the 18th of February, 106 A.D.

The siege and the destruction of Jerusalem took place during his episcopacy. He accompanied the Christian community to Pella.

Application. Before our eyes today's liturgy places a venerable, aged bishop. He was a blood relative of Jesus — on a cross, too, and in Jerusalem the relationship became even closer. He is a saint who can strengthen us in our weakness and in our struggle against sin.

2. Holy Mass (Statuit). From the Common. I will make a special effort to celebrate this Mass with St. Simeon and in his spirit. As an echo of our martyr's cry to heaven, I pray the *Kyrie*. How fervently he must have prayed, "Lord, have mercy on me," as the executioners approached. Then the *Gloria*, his song of praise and thanksgiving. Simeon next rises to preach in the *Epistle* and *Gospel*. "Blessed is the man who endures trials." No one is better qualified to make this statement than he, he who today wears "the crown of life." Presently he turns to me: what is your trial, your temptation? And how do you meet it? The saint presses his point, mincing no words. He speaks of "hating" all his loved ones, yes, even his own life. This truly is a hard saying: to give up for Christ all those things which the natural man holds dearest. But anyone who does not patiently bear his life's cross, including all the thorns of his profession, environment, and destiny, cannot be Christ's disciple. You are building a tower, viz., Christ's kingdom in your soul. Do you wish it to remain unfinished? How many Christians, alas, are like such unfinished towers! Our holy martyr has a right to preach to us in this way; for in life and, even more, in death he practiced what he preached.

As the *Offertory* arrives, Simeon walks in his last Offertory procession, the one that took him to death. How willing, how resolute his offering; how complete his sacrifice! As for me, I will try to follow in his footsteps. And now the *Consecration*. What was it that lent such great holiness to our martyr's death? It was that Christ's death was renewed in his own body. Lastly, the *Communion*. Today we celebrate the holy martyr's eternal Communion, viz., his everlasting union with Christ. Mark his wounds, how they shine! And I, unworthy that I am, receive a ray of this eternal Light.

MASS OF OUR LADY ON SATURDAY

Saturday is dedicated to Mary. Hence, on Saturdays when no feast occurs or only a "simplex," as the rubrics say, the Office and the Mass are of the Blessed Virgin. On such days the Mother of God is our guide and inspiration for the Mass and through the day.

1. **On these Saturdays** the third Lesson of the Divine Office is always devoted to Mary. For *January* we have an excerpt from a letter of St. Ambrose to Pope Siricius. "The heretics say: Mary was indeed a virgin when she conceived but not when she gave birth. Hence, if we are to believe them, since conception always precedes birth, she could have conceived as a virgin but would not have been a virgin after the birth of Jesus. If they are unwilling to believe the teaching of priests, let them believe Christ's pronouncements and the words of the angels, for they say: 'Nothing is impossible with God.' Let them believe the Apostles' Creed, which the Roman Church has ever kept, and still keeps, inviolate. Having heard the angel's announcement, Mary asked: 'How shall this happen?' She was not questioning the birth, but seeking its manner; for, when reassured, she replied: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word.'"

In February the Lesson is from St. Jerome's Book against Jovinian. "Christ was a virgin, and the Mother of our virgin

Lord was ever a virgin; she was, in fact, both mother and virgin. For Jesus entered through a closed door. Likewise in His tomb, which was newly hewn of the hardest rock, no other had been laid either before or after Him — *a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed*. Mary is the 'gate facing the East,' as Ezechiel says, which is ever closed and shining; the gate which retains or permits egress to the Holy of Holies; the gate by which the Sun of justice, our High Priest according to Melchisedech, enters and leaves."

2. **Holy Mass (Vultum tuum).** As should be expected, the Mass of the Blessed Virgin in Christmas time (from December 26 to February 1) reflects the spirit and theology of the Christmas season. The Readings (*Epist.* and *Gosp.*) are borrowed from the Shepherds' Mass on Christmas. The liturgy takes us back to that holy night, showing us in the *Epistle* the divine Christ Child ("the goodness and kindness of God our Savior"), and in the Gospel, His Mother wrapt in holy contemplation before the Child and the worshipping shepherds. The Church is indicating to us what thoughts should fill our hearts until Candlemas. Nevertheless, the emphasis is not exactly the same as on the feast of the Nativity itself. Then our attention was directed primarily to the newborn Lord and King; here it centers on the Mother of our loving Savior. Note in particular the words in the *Gospel*: "But Mary kept in mind all these words and pondered them in her heart." We should do as Mary did, especially on these Saturdays devoted to her honor.

Most of the chants praise our Blessed Mother. Using the text of Psalm 44, the *Introit* depicts a nuptial procession; Mary is the bride, and we the virgins accompanying her. The *Gradual* makes us think of the lovely Infant in the crib, the Infant who is both King and Spouse. In the *Offertory* we praise the Virgin-Mother from whom arose "the Sun of Justice, Christ our God." While approaching the altar to receive holy *Communion* we realize the "blessedness of the womb that bore the Son of the eternal Father" and acknowledge our own blessedness in receiving a similar grace (*Comm.*).